Power in My Blood: Corporeal Sovereignty through the Praxis of an Indigenous Eroticanalysis

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how Indigenous articulations of sensuality, sexuality and gender form erotic expressions and act as decolonizing mechanisms. I address the question, "If this is my body, where are my stories?" by arguing for the recovery and what I call the practice of an Indigenous eroticanalysis as a reclamation of sovereignty over our Indigenous bodies. The condemnatory language of historical settler accounts suggests that the criminalization of Indigenous sexualities and genders began at first contact. Any freedoms or diversities of Indigenous sexuality and gender were silenced with colonial language steeped in sexual sin, shame, and perversity. The damnation of Indigenous bodies led to the colonial invocation of "terra nullius" meaning "empty lands" to justify the theft, possession, and exploitation of Indigenous territories. Today, retaining ownership of Indigenous lands depends upon the acceptance of patriarchal social structures, including the male/female gender binary structure. I examine the Indigenous erotic as a rewriting of Indigenous bodies in which sexuality, gender, and desire are a source of power and knowledge. Engaging in an Indigenous research method, a Nehiyaw'iskwew strategy of inquiry, *Power in My Blood* investigates a compilation of erotic poetry, visual art, a play, a memorial art installation and two novels. My primary research conducts an eroticanalysis of the Windigo-killer Niska in a novel by Joseph Boyden (Anishnaabe and Scottish heritage), *Three Day Road,* and of the Redthorn Warrior Tarsa'deshae in Daniel Heath Justice's (Cherokee) sci-fi fantasy trilogy, *Kynship*. The eroticanalysis of these works reimagines and expands definitions of Indigenous gender and sexuality, and functions as a potential resource for decolonization.

For my mom, Carol Lynn Bear

I think of you, and will love you till my last breath.

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Kinanâskomitin,

for privileging me with my family and my life as a Nehiyaw'iskwew, Creator.

for the guidance of my beautiful and courageous mom, Carol Bear, who taught me to live life on my own terms and always to question authority. I miss you.

for the love and kindness of my relatives who have gone on to the spirit world – my grandma Lillian Bear, grandpa Edgar Bear, my auntie Audrey, nisîmis Jason. And for the ancestors I will meet in the next this life, I hope I can make you proud of how I lived my life.

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GLOSSARY OF NOTES AND TERMS

I do not italicize Nehiyawewin words in my thesis. Italicization is often used to represent foreign elements in a text. In a thesis grounded in Nehiyawe (*Cree*) ways of knowing, Nehiyawewin (*Cree language*) is not a foreign element and therefore shall not be italicized. Scholars such as Alice Te Punga Somerville (Maori) use similar strategies to demonstrate agency as Indigenous scholars writing in the English language.

Aboriginal: A term used by the Government of Canada to indicate three groups: First Nations, Metis, and Inuit peoples.

Biopower: The control held by the nation state to control and subjugate its subjects. This management requires techniques to control entire populations as a group.

Cis gender, cis male/cis female: males and females whose self identification conforms with their biological sex.

Colonization: refers to the formal and informal methods (behavioural, ideological, institutional, political, and economic) that maintain the subjugation and/or exploitation of Indigenous Peoples, lands, and resources.

Colonialism: Michael Yellow Bird (citizen of the Arikara [Sahnish]and Hidatsa Nations in North Dakota) gives this definition: "A system in which one people claim sovereignty over another and assert social, political, economic, and spiritual domination over the colonized."

Corporeal sovereignty: An individual's freedom, full right, and choice to govern, represent, define, own, and make decisions for that individual's own body without colonial interference or oppression.

Decolonization: "The meaningful and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetrate the subjugation and/or exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands. Decolonization is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation." Both these terms come from *Decolonizing our Minds and Actions,* a book by Waziyatatwin (Dakota from Pezihutazizi Otunwe) and Michael Yellow Bird (3).

Erotic: A space encouraging holistic knowledges, to embody the sensations of our everyday lives whether it be the sexual or the spiritual or a combination, it is truly practicing the collectivity of our capacities within ourselves.

Erotica: visual or textual expressions of the erotic.

Eroticanalysis: an alternative way of receiving and processing information, participating in an embodied practice that works to self-locate readers and authors in order to represent our own truths and our own realities, to consider lived experiences, and to cultivate and produce embodied knowledge.

Kehteyak: These are what Nehiyawak call the people "who know." They could also be seniors, Elders, community members, and cultural knowledge keepers. Henceforth, I will use the term Kehteyak to describe all the Indigenous peoples who act as teachers and storytellers and pass on cultural knowledge and who, for various reasons, do not entirely embody the term Elder.

Kinanâskomitin: Thank you, I am grateful to you.

Genderful: A term used to indicate that gender is on a spectrum and not a restricted male female gender binary. Genderful is used to describe those who identify as transgender, gender nonconforming, gender neutral, bi-gender, intersex, and gender fluid. For the purposes of this thesis, I use genderful most often when discussing missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Our gender identities do not conform to Western binaries, and this results in increased violence. I recognize that there are missing and murdered Indigenous people who are neither male or female.

Indian/Native: These terms are used almost interchangeably and represent an Indigenous person, often depending on the context or historical period.

Maskikiw Mâmtonehicikan: A term Walter Lightning (Nehiyawe) uses to describe an Indigenous Mind in Action.

Nehiyawe: Cree person. Lightning relates Elder Louis Sunchild's (Nehiyawe) teaching on the term Nehiyawe. He relays, "The word 'Nehiyaw' can be broken down into its sound components to find root words. 'Newo,' means four and 'iyaw' or miyaw' means 'body.' That means 'People of the four body.' Four is a metaphor of tremendous sacred significance. I suspect that it also has to do with the psyche, the subconscious, spiritual consideration, and more importantly the sacred significance of our being human beings" (Lightning 83).

Nehiyaw'iskwew: Cree Woman

Nehiyawak: Cree people (plural)

Nehiyawewin: Cree language

Oskâpew: Elder or Kehteyak helper. Supports and guides people in protocol, language, and ceremony. Oskâpew are Kehteyak in training.

Distorted traditionism: A term coined by Dawn Martin-Hill (Mohawk, Wolf Clan) that describes cultural traditions that become distorted or tainted due to the influences of the colonial forces and the Church. Scholars such as Emma LaRocque (Plains Cree/Métis) and Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaw) challenge the idea of cultural traditions as static.

Tradition: As it pertains to Indigenous cultural traditions, tradition is the idea that there are long-standing actions, words, concepts, and beliefs that have remained unchanged from time immemorial. Claiming that specific actions or words are "traditional" and invoking the word "tradition" is expected to have little or no critical opposition. LaRocque and other Indigenous scholars tend to challenge the idea of cultural traditions, to reject the idea that cultural traditions have and should remain the same as they have been since the beginning of time, and call for Indigenous people to be "circumspect in our recall of tradition" (LaRocque 14). She offers instead the perspective that traditions change over time and that as Indigenous peoples we must be careful in how we remember traditions.

Tradition (as it pertains to the erotic): Tradition as an element in Indigenous erotics seeks to trace the ways in which Mark Rifkin describes as, "trauma and tradition are braided with each other and how they are borne in bodily experience" (2012, 55). In this context, tradition is acknowledged as being "haunted," meaning that the colonial the term "haunting" in this context, and uses the "figure of haunting to index the ways the ways the past splits open the present, undoing what appears evident, revealing how things taken legacies of violence act as ghosts to haunt our beliefs about "tradition." The haunting allows us to acknowledge the imagined ideas of our traditions. Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee) coined as given are the effort of ongoing processes (including normalized legacy of state violence),

and giving use to possibilities that (officially) were foreclosed and forgotten" (qtd. in Rifkin 2012, 53)

Transcendence: The realm of truest possibilities and truest realities that extend beyond the boundaries of "normalized" or colonized experience.

Turtle Island: Also known as North America

Sex (noun): Sex can be used in two different ways; the first is to describe a person's gender (the choices often being only female or male – see "genderful"). As mentioned under "sexuality," there has been considerable discussion about gender and everything in between male and female. The World Association for Sexual Health (WAS), after consultation with the World Health Organization (WHO), currently defines sex as follows: "Sex refers to the biological characteristics which define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive, as there are individual who possess both, but these characteristics tend to differentiate humans as males and females" (http://www.worldsexology.org/resources). However, there are many cultures, and societies that do not limit themselves to such narrow thinking. To determine a person's "sex" solely by their reproductive organs brings great challenges. For example, if a person were a hermaphrodite and born with both male and female reproductive organs, how would one categorize them? Male or female? Gender descriptions must be left up to the individual and how they see and identify themselves.

The next two definitions are taken from the World Association for Sexual Health (Working Definitions after WHO Technical Consultation on Sexual Health) website: http://www.who.int/reproductive-health/gender/sexualhealth.html

Sexuality: "Sexuality is the central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitude, values, behaviors, practices, roles and relationships. While sexuality can include all these dimensions, not all of them are always experienced or expressed. Sexuality is influenced by the interaction of biological, psychological, social, economic, political, cultural, ethical, legal, historical and religious and spiritual factors"
– (World Association for Sexual Health).

Sexual rights: "Sexual rights embrace human rights that are already recognized in national laws, international human rights documents and other consensus documents. These include the right of all persons, free of coercion, discrimination and violence, to:

- the highest attainable standard of health in relation to sexuality, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services
- seek, receive and impart information in relation to sexuality
- sexuality education
- respect for bodily integrity
- choice of partner
- decide to be sexually active or not
- consensual sexual relations
- consensual marriage
- decide whether or not, and when to have children
- pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life"
  – (World Association for Sexual Health).

NAMES AND NATIONS

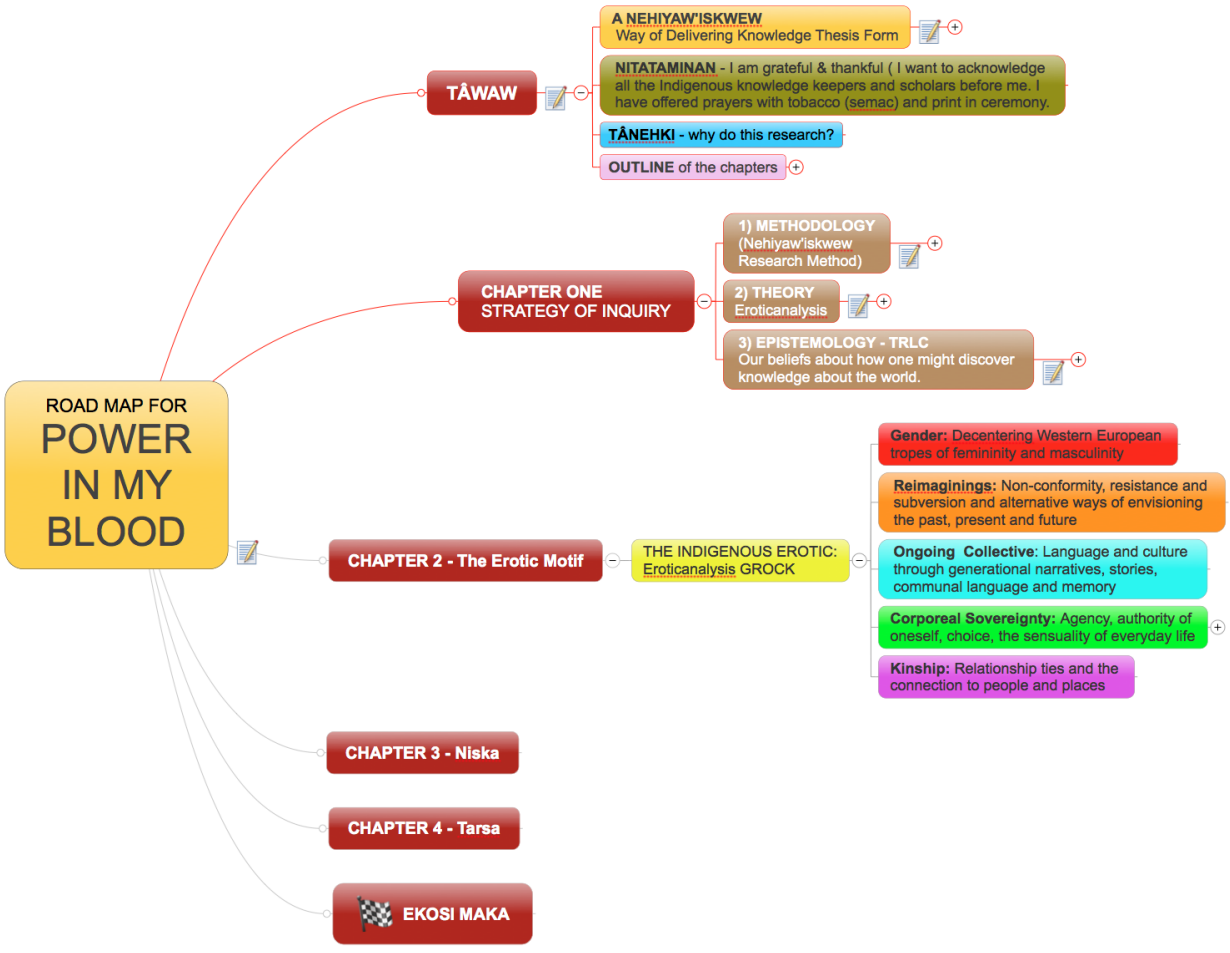
(These are accompanied by the number of the page on which they first appear)

TÂWAW

Welcome! Let me introduce myself and give you a road map to my thesis.

There are four parts to this section:

1) **Nehiyaw'iskwew** Way of delivering knowledge
2) **Nitataminan**: Acknowledging the Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers before me.
3) **Tânehki**: Why do this research?
4) **Outline**: An outline of the chapters



A Nehiyaw'iskwew Way of Delivering Knowledge

Power in My Blood begins with a road map for you, my curious reader. With this map, I hope to support and nourish your learning in a respectful, mindful, and engaging way. My road map is a Nehiyaw'iskwew way of delivering knowledge. It gives you, curious reader, a way of understanding research and knowledge that are bound to my Indigenous ways of knowing and being. It focuses on present-day struggles and resistance against colonization, specifically the dispossession of Indigenous bodies and Indigenous lands. As explained in the abstract, my research began as an exploration of the potentialities of Indigenous erotica, but became much more. As I processed and arranged my research material, a new theoretical and epistemological approach emerged – a practice I call eroticanalysis. While researching and examining Indigenous erotica, my methodology aligned with my practice and I was immersed in the sensual, the embodied, the erotic realm. Now, my intrigued reader, it is time for you to find your erotic self.

The following suggestions are erotic methods to allow you to navigate and engage in my thesis in an exploratory, experimental, and reflective way. If you are reading this in its current form,[1] you likely have a PhD, which many consider the highest academic degree you can earn. I commend you for your thirst for knowledge, creativity, intelligence, and for your relentlessness and sacrifice. I wonder if you struggled, as I have, with writing your thesis within the bounded logics of Western research and academia. Did you feel restricted by the codes and language in political and public discourse designed to legitimize particular assumptions and viewpoints and delegitimize, reject, and deny others?

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[1] Oskâpew says, "In terms of how I address you, reader, think of *Power in My Blood* as a stone thrown in the water. The current form, or the first ring of ripples on the pond, is at the 'stage' of a PhD dissertation. It often addresses the specific audience that is my PhD committee members and supervisors. As a first step in the practice of an eroticanalysis, it is crucial that I acknowledge the privileged spaces of academia. When I am successful in defending my dissertation, the next stage for *Power in My Blood* will be to seek to address a much wider audience. As this work progresses to larger audiences, some of the directed language will open up to a wider audience. I require the right to evolve, adapt, and adjust *Power in My Blood,* as I see fit for my audience.

Depending upon your experience, disposition and/or inclination in the reading of theses, I realize it may be a challenge for you to *step away* from the conventional English dissertation standards[2] and *reject* reading *Power in My Blood* in a predictably objective, systematic, and "academic" way. I intend to (dis)organize and ground my work in the ethos of the sensual and the erotic, to find an embodied voice to convey my growing knowledge on the erotic and to inspire you. I encourage you, curious reader, to practice the erotic as you engage in the material. Edification of the erotic requires erotic practice – that is, deep reflection *and* corporeal action.[3]

I am following the advice of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Mãori) and Toni Morrison, who suggest using imagination – in this case, my own Nehiyaw'iskwew imagination and creativity - to share my world with you. I am offering a language *and a practice* to interpret and understand an alternative episteme to Western knowledges.

Curious reader, you may be wondering what many of these terms mean … erotic, erotica, Indigenous, embodied, erotic self and eroticanalysis. I am hesitant to disrupt our exciting conversation and detract from the task at hand, but if you need a brief explanation of these terms, please see page vii, Glossary of Notes and Terms. And if you need an even more detailed explanation to understand and move forward, please skip to chapter two. "The Erotic Motif," on page 106 and return HERE as soon as you are ready.

I will wait for you.

Now I humbly ask that you let me be your guide and follow my suggestions (and sometimes detailed instructions) while you engage in *Power in My Blood*. The embodied devices I offer you have simple intentions: the first is a *preventative measure*, to remind

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[2] Oskâpew says, "A conventional PhD thesis often includes an outline of the problem, literature review, background to the research population or subject area, a methodology chapter, results, and a conclusion (implications for further research, addition to scholarship). A literary analysis of a text often uses an objective, disembodied voice and also uses primary and secondary references."

[3] Oskâpew says, "This is a creative critical thesis that happily steps beyond the boundaries of convention and into a critical, Indigenous, anti-oppressive space.

you gently of the Indigenous erotic space you inhabit. To redirect you (if necessary) before you default to (or fall under the seductive spell of) reading and measuring *Power in My Blood* with the normalized frequencies and conventions of the academy (thereby re-legitimizing Western ways of knowing and disseminating knowledge). Secondly, *Power in My Blood* offers an alternative practice of knowledge production and dissemination by engaging in the erotic – and you are given the rare opportunity for erotic self-reflection *and* its physical practice.

Remember! Be self-reflexive about the content and the ways you read and understand the material. For example, it is not about agreeing or disagreeing with the content, but reflecting on WHY you agree or disagree. Self-discovery demands that we be introspective about our intellectual, spiritual, physical, and emotional selves. This principle of the erotic obligates both reader and author to be self-reflexive and self-aware; it asks the questions, "How do we relate to, and therefore understand, the text?" Not only does an eroticanalysis require reflection on your relationship with the text, but you should also be aware of how the texts relate to **each other**. For instance, the eroticanalysis of Niska's moontime in Chapter Three incorporates my embodied experiences of moontime, and an experience of drummer Shannon Thunderbird (Anishnaabe). An eroticanalysis requires you, reader, to contemplate the relationship **between** these texts (of Thunderbird and myself) as well. While this strategy may seem disruptive, this is intentional. Think of it this way: the employment of these embodied narratives acts in the same way as academic evidence – to corroborate and verify research. Additionally, through the use of embodied narratives, readers are encouraged to consider and reflect on the relatedness between these narratives in order to enrich the depth of the conversation and cultivate fresh, thoughtful insight.

In the physical practice of an eroticanalysis, you are asked to participate physically with the text. For example, after you read the section called *Pig Girl*, then, like the participants in the story, you will be asked to share your thoughts in a talking circle. You will imagine that

you are sitting in that circle, holding an eagle feather and being invited to speak on the issues at hand. What would you say? How do you feel about this highly emotional subject? I ask that you literally speak out loud and express your knowledges, feelings, and concerns on the topic. I offer you a group of potential embodied devices (actions and reflections) that are placed strategically within *Power in My Blood*. If you do skip these exercises, reflect why you chose to ignore them. How did these requests make you feel?

I've contemplated deeply what to include in this introduction called Tâwaw. My intention is to find a balance for you, curious reader, to give you enough tools to follow along and understand, to review and assess critically, to be deeply self-reflective, and to enjoy the journey. But I also intend to disrupt and unsettle you. The heinous and inhumane violence against Indigenous women, girls and genderful folk – my primary motivation for our conversation – is deeply troubling.

So why should *you* be comfortable?

Through ceremonies like the Sun Dance, sweat lodge, or even fasting, I've learned that being physically or emotionally uncomfortable is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, any fleeting emotional or physical pain you have gives you an opportunity to feel gratitude. Too often, we fail to recognize the privileged and safe spaces that we occupy — from the health of our bodies to the safety and comfort of our homes. The fourth day of your fast is your last day of hunger until *you choose* the next time you fast. The last round of the sweat may be unbearably hot, but after the doors of the lodge open, your body is free – that is, until *you choose* the next time to enter a sweat lodge. These freedoms and privileges should not be taken lightly; many do not have the same chance for reprieve from emotional, spiritual, or physical pain.

Our discomfort gives us the opportunity
to *recognize* and *reflect* on our privileged spaces.

As for my own privileged space, curious reader, I have included some of my own reflections in this introduction. Tâwaw begins first and foremost with a section called Nitataminan, meaning "I am grateful and thankful" in Nehiyawewin. This space acknowledges and recognizes the Indigenous knowledge keepers, artists, scholars and Kehteyak that have come before me. Their work and teachings on tradition, culture, ceremony, literature, Indigenous methodologies, theories, epistemologies, and ontologies have greatly informed my own work. I remain forever indebted to them.

Before you, curious reader, embark on *Power in My Blood,* a quick word on language and epistemology. Obviously, I use the English language in my thesis; so, as I write in English and think as a Nehiyawe, I am purposefully "reinventing the colonizers' language"[4]. Therefore, as a responsible author and teacher, I will acknowledge new definitions and address any reinventions of familiar terms. Trust that I will guide you, intrepid reader, through *Power in My Blood* in a few ways: through the use of a glossary of notes and terms, the incorporation of short anecdotes to help readers understand larger concepts, and the inclusion of a reader's helper, Oskâpew. You may have noticed that the footnote location has been appropriated as a convenient place for the voice of Oskâpew. Oskâpewsak[5] act as helpers to Elders or Kehteyak. Like the guides who help in ceremony, I am your Oskâpew, reader. Through the footnotes, my Oskâpew voice will lead you and assist you as you tread the pathways of *Power in My Blood*. Like any good Oskâpew, I've done my best to predict and identify any questions or concerns that might arise.

[4] Oskâpew says, "Gloria Bird and Joy Harjo have coined the term 'reinventing the enemy's language' to describe the practice of Indigenous writers using the English language as a decolonial and subversive method.

[5] Oskâpew says, "Oskâpewsak is the plural form of oskâpew, and they are helpers to Elders and Kehteyak. They also guide people through ceremony."

I recognize that some English words have heavy historical and theoretical complexities to them, and that they come with what I call "language luggage." This re-invention of the English language opens the door to new perspectives, specifically, that of this Nehiyaw'iskwew[6] mind. The use of English can have benefits, according to Emma LaRocque (Plains Cree/Métis) who states:

> English ironically is now serving to unite us, and, in many ironic respects, serving to decolonize us. Our usage of English is, of course, not necessarily that of the colonizer. Since we have a painful and political relationship with this language, we attend to the task of "reinventing the enemy's language" as Joy Harjo (member of the Mvskoke Nation) has so aptly put it. To re-invent the "enemy's language"' is a re-creative process and as such, English is now as much our vehicle of creative expression as it is our vehicle of resistance. (2010, 21-22)

For example, the English concept of "transcendence" is often related to Kantian philosophy, as well as to Aristotle and the Greek philosopher Plato. When the term "transcendence" or "transcending" is used within a Nehiyaw'iskwew framework, the word then becomes the realm of truest possibilities and truest realities that extend beyond the boundaries of "normalized" – aka colonized – experience.

Nitataminan: "I am grateful and thankful" in Nehiyawewin

I want to claim this space and this time early on to acknowledge all the Indigenous knowledge keepers and scholars before me.

I have made offerings of semac (tobacco) and print
(coloured broadcloth in 1–2 metre pieces)
during ceremony and offer these
in gratitude for these

[6] Oskâpew says, "Nehiyaw'iskwew means a Cree woman."

knowledge keepers
and scholars.

While *Power in My Blood* is constructed and presented by one person, it represents a *collective* understanding of Nehiyawak[7] knowledge and epistemologies. Although I may have created a new sculptural form, I am indebted to the repository of clay of a thousand ancestors already present and flowing in my blood. Kinanâskomitin (I thank all of you) for my ancestral knowledge, Kehteyak, community members, and family members for always providing me with everything I need.

In his MA thesis, "Compassionate Mind: Implications of a Text Written by Elder Louis Sunchild," the late Walter Lightning (Nehiyawe), describes his research approach of Maskikiw Mâmtonehicikan as "the Indigenous mind in action" (31). Maskiwiw Mâmtonehicikan means "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (Lightning 31). Working with the late Elder Louis Sunchild (Nehiyawe), and relying upon Julie Cruikshank's collaborative techniques, Lightning understood the research process as holistic. Lightning's conversation with Sunchild regarding Maskikiw Mâmtonehicikan (31) opened up my mind to further Nehiyawak concepts. These understandings have coalesced and are included in *Power in My Blood* within the following four elements: **locality** (self-location, a way of locating myself for the reader and presenting my subjective voice as deeply embedded within the spiritual and cultural responsibilities and obligations); **textual resistance** (literary strategies employed by the author to embody storytelling techniques); **ceremony** (spiritual implications and activities, the practice of connecting ourselves to each other and to the cosmos); and **relational accountability**[8] (which requires that I ask myself and my communities about the relevance and value of my work – is it meaningful to the Indigenous

[7] Oskâpew says, "Nehiyawak means Cree people."
[8] Oskâpew says, "Be patient; these terms are briefly defined here, but more thoroughly explained later."

community?).[9] As you will soon see, curious reader, the section titled "Nitataminan" in chapter one highlights the crucial conversations of which I am a part, and my relationship to them. Most importantly, I share with you the scholars and authors whose critical dialogue on Indigenous research methods has been integral to my own research and work.

Chapter one outlines my strategy of inquiry, which includes my Nehiyaw'iskwew research method. It is an honour for me to explain my reasoning; the next section, titled "Tânêhki," meaning *why?* in Nehiyawewin, shares the impetus behind my research, the reasoning behind my particular strategy of inquiry, and briefly explores other, more "conventional" methodological and theoretical approaches. As well, I examine how my Nehiyaw'iskwew research method adds to, and exists alongside, the methodologies currently in use.

Tânêhki – Why do this research? Why do this research like this?

My interest in the erotic began early, and I have my mom to thank. She loved to read all genres of books, from non-fiction to fiction, romance to horror, detective mysteries to westerns. But her taste in magazines was very particular: she only liked magazines with plots of romance and true love. She would leave these magazines, with their garish and glossy covers, lying around the house, and I would happily read them. Noticing my interest, she began to mark a large "X" on the sections I wasn't allowed to read – sections she deemed too mature or provocative for a young mind. Accordingly, the "X" became a signal for the sensual bits, and from then on, I read *only* the stories marked with the "X." Like most good research, my inquiries stem from simple, albeit fierce and long-standing, curiosity. From an early age, my curiosity emanated from the erotic parts of the stories that were left out, censored, or altered. However, a second experience early in my academic career set me on my current research path. As an undergraduate, I was invited to lecture

[9] Oskâpew says, "These four components do not stand alone, nor are they positioned as a static group. Rather, inasmuch as they function here as my foundational methodological pillars, these elements are interwoven, intersecting with and informing each other."

about my work in Nehiyawewin[10] while at Te Tumu, the Faculty of Māori, Pacific, and Indigenous Studies at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand/Aotearoa. After the conference, we settled in for the weekend on the Marae (a traditional and sacred Māori gathering place) and an intriguing cultural exchange began. Little did I realize that the simple act of sharing stories between Māori and my Nehiyawe[11] cultures would determine the direction of my graduate research. Brought up with Trickster tales told by my grandmother and her siblings, I shared some Wisahkecahk[12] stories during a night of impromptu storytelling. I learned that Wisahkecahk and his Māori counterpart, Mawi, share a parallel universe – the teachings from their trials, travels and (mis)adventures serve as a maps to negotiate our Indigenous selves in the world. The repertoire of our trickster stories matched evenly, and ranged from themes warning about the dangers of gluttony and selfishness to celebrations of love, kinship and family. We even had similar creation stories. As the night deepened, the Mawi stories became more sexually suggestive. Here my storytelling faltered, as I had never been told a single erotic Wisahkecahk story. My research thus began with an inquiry about the conspicuous absence of the erotic in traditional stories. Other tricksters, like the Raven (Pacific Northwest Coast), Coyote (southwestern US), Nanabush (Algonquian-speaking peoples), Rabbit (southeastern), and Mawi, were certainly accompanied by stories about their enormous appetites for food and sex. As for crazy sexual escapades, Wisahkecahk stories from my family were almost nonexistent. I only found traces of the erotic in Older Brother stories, but they seemed like echoes of the other rich, complex stories I had heard about Wisahkecahk. Older Brother was just as selfish and mischievous as his counterparts, so where were his stories? Had these stories been left out on purpose, or did my family just not know any?

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[10] Oskâpew says, "Nehiyawewin means the Cree language."

[11] Oskâpew says, "Nehiyawe means a Cree person."

[12] Oskâpew says, "Wisahkecahk, also known sometimes as Older Brother, is a Nehiyawe trickster. Crossing boundaries and breaking societal rules, the trickster is responsible for the way the world has come to be. The trickster creates and destroys, and is at the centre of many sacred stories."

I wondered about the absence of the erotic in these stories. What forces were at play? In my family? In my community? If our stories teach us how to live well in all aspects of our lives, what happens when our erotic stories are erased? Is there a connection among the suppression of the erotic in our stories, colonialism, and endemic sexual violence against Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk? Who defines my sexuality as an Indigenous woman?

If this is my body, where are my stories?[13]

To understand the prevailing attitudes and current crises regarding Indigenous women's bodies, a quick search using words like *Indigenous* + *women* + *sexuality* vividly will depict the sexual violence directed at indigenous women and girls. Deborah Miranda (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation/Chumash) explains the complexity of the Indigenous erotic within the context of such normalized brutality:

> "An Indigenous erotic" is a perpetual act of balancing – always working toward balance through one's actions, intent, and understanding of the world. But both love and the erotic are at odds with the violence and domination that structures any colonizing or patriarchal culture. (4)

The balancing of the erotic is crucial for Indigenous people.
We must work tirelessly to
redefine. remake. reimagine
that which has been defined for us.

The decolonization of Indigenous bodies begins with the erotic. Indigenous women, girls and genderful people have suffered greatly. Over the past 60 years, over 1400 Indigenous

[4] Oskâpew says, "This references the title of Ted Chamberlin's book, *If This Is Your Land, Where are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*. Chamberlin quotes a Gitskan Elder who, responding to government officials' claims to the Gitskan's traditional territory, says, 'If this is your land, where are your stories?'"

women, girls, and genderful people have gone missing or been murdered in Canada. Even more horrifying, these statistics do not include disappearances or extreme forms of violence like rape (Amnesty International). According to the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), Aboriginal women are almost three times more likely to be killed by a stranger than other women (NWAC). Our women, girls, and genderful people continue to be subjected to genocidal violence due to the institutionalization of heteropatriarchal beliefs about gender and sexualities.

Indigenous women between the ages of 25 and 44 are five times more likely than other Canadian women to die a violent death. We represent only 4.3 percent of the total female population, yet 16 percent of murder victims are Indigenous (Stolen Sisters, 2004 and No More Stolen Sisters, 2009). We die at the hands of our partners, husbands, lovers, and friends as often as at those of strangers. Andrea Smith, co-founder of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, and author of *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide,* asserts that "[e]thno-stress is the reality of our situation as Native women, which is directly related to the process of colonization, sexual violence, dehumanization and marginalizing who we are" (xvii).

While most of my non-Indigenous friends are shocked when they hear my own experiences of this violence (that I relate later in the thesis, in the gondola story), my story hardly compares to any number of narratives about what has been dubbed the "Highway of Tears,"[14] or horrors that happened on a pig farm in BC. However, my story demonstrates the daily oppression and marginalization affecting every single Indigenous woman in Canada. It has become just as acceptable for a young man to dehumanize an Indigenous woman publicly as it is for a disproportionate number of Indigenous women to go missing along a

[14] Oskâpew says, "The Highway of Tears is a stretch of highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert where many Indigenous women have gone missing or have been found murdered."

720-km highway in Northern BC. Indigenous women struggle within a colonial relationship that is itself, sexualized and gendered.

Tânêhki. Why do this research? Sexual violence is rampant in many Indigenous communities in Canada; Andrea Smith bluntly states, "Sexual abuse must be seen with an understanding of the history of colonization, which uses sexuality as a tool to gain power over others and to control women's bodies" (2). Heteronormative patriarchy has been so ingrained in our minds and our communities that we don't recognize that our recollections and understandings of tradition have changed to reflect the truths of the dominant colony. We have internalized the sexual values, concepts of gender and sexuality of the dominant culture. Beth Brant (Quinte Mohawk from the Tyendinaga Mohawk Reserve) argues:

> Much of the self-hatred we carry around inside us is centuries old. This self-hatred is so coiled within itself, we often cannot distinguish the racism from the homophobia from the sexism. We carry the stories of our grandmothers, our ancestors. And some of these stories are ugly and terrorizing. And some are beautiful testaments to endurance and dignity. We must learn to emulate this kind of testimony. Speaking ourselves out loud – for our people, for ourselves. To deny our sexuality is to deny our part in creation. (63)

Tânêhki. Why do this research? The pervasive oppression of patriarchy has left Indigenous women marginalized within our own Indigenous communities, leading to an appalling underrepresentation in our tribal and national leadership assemblies. Current chiefs and councils are often unwilling to focus on the problem of gendered violence, and their silence sanctions this violence against us.

Tânêhki. Why do this research? Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk have restrictions placed upon their bodies or are prohibited from attending various ceremonies under the guise of following cultural traditions and protocols. Indigenous

"traditions" that prohibit women from participating in ceremony derives from the invasion of the colonial narrative that demands the homogenization of a heterosexual patriarchal normative. Emma LaRocque warns us:

> As women we must be circumspect in our recall of tradition. We must ask ourselves whether and to what extent tradition is liberating to us as women … There are indications of male violence and sexism in some Aboriginal societies prior to European contact. … As Native women … we are challenged to change, create, and embrace "traditions" consistent with contemporary and international human rights standards. (14)

The only bodies relatively free from restrictions and subjugation are white heterosexual cis male[15] bodies. Any deviation or transgression from this heterosexual patriarchal normative seemingly waives any body's right to sovereignty. Dawn Martin Hill (Mohawk, Wolf Clan) shares, "In many Native communities these Christian gender roles have been adopted and rebranded as 'traditional'; excluding women from ceremonies and placing cultural restrictions on their behaviors" (107). We must critically examine, question, and investigate the use of tradition, or risk recreating the colonial mentalities of the restrictive heteropatriarchal paradigm ourselves; we must ask ourselves the question, are they liberating or oppressive? Craig Womack (Creek Cherokee) and his influential work *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, argues for the need to evaluate our claims of tradition to "legitimize present action" (385) and asks, "Let us say that a group of elders could assert confidently that traditionally Blackfoot men *did* used to hit women, would that mean that Blackfoot men should continue to hit women today?" (385). As well, Joanne Barker (Lenni-Lenape – Delaware Tribe of Indians) shares this powerful quote from Maliseet Elder

[15] Oskâpew says, "Cis-gender, or cis-male/cis-female are males and females whose self-identification conforms with their biological sex."

Shirley Bear, who recalls the attitude of bands and the NIB (National Indian Brotherhood) as Indigenous women fought to secure gender equity: "They even stated…, 'It is our tradition and our culture if we want to discriminate against women'" (Barker 142).

Additionally, it remains critical for Indigenous scholars to stay vigilant and fight back against the ongoing New Age commodification and exploitation of Indigenous spirituality and ceremonies. Tuhiwai Smith states:

> New Age groups currently appropriate indigenous spiritual beliefs at will; some claim to be inhabited by indigenous spirit guides while others merely interpret their 'own' (individualized) dreams as an Indigenous spiritual experience." (102)

New Age spirituality is inevitably accompanied by ritualistic ceremonies, which are often corrupted and unearned[16] versions of Indigenous ceremonies. These ritualistic performances are "acted out" without proper context, thereby relegating the ceremonies to the tradition of New Age mysticism. Although many New Agers claim to help and serve others through spirituality, the truth remains that theirs is a profitable industry, and these profits are being amassed primarily through the exoticization of cultural ceremonies and spirituality. For example, such practices came under scrutiny when two people died and 19 were hospitalized after a "sweat-lodge ceremony" made headline news in 2009. Multimillionaire and self-proclaimed New Age spiritual warrior James Arthur Ray charged each participant almost $7,000 to partake in fasting and ceremony to find their "inner warrior." Valerie Taliman, a Navajo journalist, discusses this tragedy and the implications of this continued theft of culture and identity in her article "Selling the Sacred" in *Indian Country Today*; she writes:

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[16] Oskâpew says, "Indigenous cultural ceremonies are earned through many years of assisting and helping Kehteyak as oskapewsak. Even after many years of learning, ceremonies must be bestowed upon you, Kehteyak 'give' you the right to practice specific ceremonies (and only those ceremonies). These rights can also be taken away."

> Wilmer Mesteth, a traditional spiritual leader and Lakota culture instructor at Oglala Lakota College, told the summit that "sacred traditions like our Lakota Pipe ceremony, vision quests, sweat lodge ceremonies and the sundance were given to us by our Creator and have enabled Indian people to survive a 500 year holocaust. Those sacred traditions are precious to us and [we] can't allow them to be desecrated and abused." "We have to put a stop to it," Mesteth said. "We are the ones who were given these ceremonies so that the people would remain together and strong. We were told to take care of these ceremonies so that our children and their children would have [a] future. For too long, we stood by and watched this abuse going on and we see how it is affecting the people. Now it's time to take a stand to defend our people and our ways." (http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/opinion/selling-the-sacred-15597)

As a part of a decolonizing methodology, Indigenous researchers must feel encouraged to share relevant elements of spirituality and ceremony (those that they *can* share) within their own research. Shawn (Nehiyawe), in his book *Research as Ceremony*, states that ceremonies are designed to allow the extraordinary to take place (69). He relates that an Elder once told him, "If it is possible to get every single person in a room thinking about the exact same thing for only two seconds, then a miracle will happen," as it is a massive collective with a "raised consciousness" (69). Along the same lines, Womack also argues that Native peoples must continually imagine themselves and their experiences in relation to the collective experience (396). Once we have reached the same space, we are open to a larger realm of possibilities, and then the extraordinary can take place.

As Indigenous people, we must articulate our own Indigenous methodological approaches. These approaches, honouring and respecting our worldviews, are imperative as the number of Indigenous scholars within post-secondary institutions

continues to grow. Narungga scholar Lester-Irabinna Rigney,[17] argues that "Indigenous peoples think and interpret the world and its realities in differing ways to non-Indigenous peoples because of their experiences, histories, cultures and values" (8).

Western European systems of knowledge and research are based on norms, values, and cultural beliefs produced, cultivated, circulated, and legitimized by the dominant powers. These are research methods by which all other methodologies are judged, measured, and oppressed. Knowledge production, and thus the underlying relationships of dominance and subordination, often go unchallenged. Traditional social science research constructs and authorizes particular views, values, and cultural beliefs while delegitimizing and silencing those who sit on the margins. Western discourse about the other, according to Edward Said's book, *Orientalism*, is supported by "institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles" (2).

Existing "acceptable" methodologies in academia have historically denigrated subjective voices. Furthermore, as LaRocque argues, there is a danger in using personal narratives or "embodied knowledge" as a legitimate source of knowledge within the realm of academia. When Indigenous scholars (and others) choose to use an "embodied knowledge," it can result in that research being dismissed as somehow illegitimate or less critical than research derived from a "disembodied" voice. Often, embodied knowledge is not considered academically rigorous, which, as LaRocque points out, can mean that

> the Aboriginal woman's intelligence is either minimized or dismissed entirely. Such reduction or dismissal can lead not only to academic ostracizing from outsiders but also to ostracizing from within our communities, whether that community is at home or in the academy. (13)

[17] Oskâpew says, "Lester-Irabinna Rigney is an Indigenous Aboriginal scholar from Australia who works in the field of Education."

There are different ways of practicing research. Indeed, postmodernism, critical race theory, queer theory, and feminism have opened up anti-oppressive and resistant approaches within academia[18]. And yet many of these "disembodied knowledge" research practices and theories still demand a strictly objective and neutral positioning of the researcher. By refusing to disconnect theory from research practices, *Power in My Blood* embraces an "embodied knowledge." Embodied knowledge requires the transformation of our research methods as part of an "emancipatory commitment" to "establish a position of resistance" within the academy; as Tuhwai Smith points out, we must be "deeply concerned with research as praxis … [and] move continually between theory and practice, reflecting on how innovative and critical research theories might be applied, and then modifying theories as a result of … practice experience" (9).

Please go to www.thesaurus.com and type in the word *objective*.
Look at the synonyms. Read them out loud.
Imagine the potential if we decide not to play objectively.

So why do this research? Tânêhki? We are more. We have more power than we are told. We have more power than we believe. We are the songs, the stories, and the blood of our grandmothers. These things tell us our truths. We are not the vulnerable and the weak. We disavow the categories of whores, victims, bad mothers, addicts, sex workers, welfare recipients, or brown-bodied temptresses. In our actions, our words, our statements, we define ourselves and shall fight against the racialized, simplified, stigmatized and sexualized versions of ourselves. Why do this research, and for how long?

until there are no more missing,
pushed-off-a-building, burned,

[18] Oskâpew says, "While these anti-oppressive, unconventional methodologies deserve far more space and explanation, it is not within the scope of my thesis to go into great detail. However, these richly complex methods have challenged the academy and offered alternative methods of practicing research.

put-in-a-hockey-bag-and-dumped-on-a-dirt-road,
left-to-die-naked-and-alone-in-the-cold,
tortured,
beaten,
cut,

murdered Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. For the most part, the common occurrence of sexual and gendered violence against Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk goes unnoticed by society at large, and this blind-eye attitude is a brutal reminder of the continuous processes of colonial subjugation at work. We remain mired in a shameful and tragic drama in which every Canadian – even you, well-intentioned reader – plays a part.

OUTLINING THE CHAPTERS

Chapter One

Finally, I will outline the four chapters for you, intrepid reader. Chapter One outlines my strategy of inquiry and has three parts, including: 1) Methodology of a Nehiyaw'iskwew Research Method; 2) a theoretical framework based on principles of the Indigenous Erotic, through which I analyze Indigenous Erotica – I call this "Eroticanalysis"; and 3) Epistemology. My strategy of inquiry includes my Nehiyaw'iskwew research methodology and relates to my "Nehiyaw'iskwew Way of Delivering Knowledge" (mentioned at the beginning of Tâwaw). My methodology outlines the tools and techniques of my research and demonstrates the ways in which I go about gathering knowledge, finding out, and gaining more knowledge about my reality. My methodology has two parts, Embodied Knowledge (records of my own relevant bodily experience) and a Literature Review (of Indigenous erotica and the research and works surveyed). Embodied Knowledge includes six lived bodily experiences, entitled Gondola; "Tante Ohci Kiya?"; *Pig Girl*; *Walking With Our Sisters*

(WWOS); Cultural Teachings; and Teaching Erotica (in a course called Native Studies 280, Indigenous Erotica). The literature review has four parts that explore fiction or non-fiction literature by (mostly) Indigenous scholars, authors and artists who express past or present knowledge about Indigenous identities, sexualities, gender, sensualities and sex. The sections are 1) Survivor Narratives; 2) Moral Guides; 3) Expressions in Indigenous Erotica; and the last is called 4) Nitataminan, a phrase you may recognize from earlier as meaning "I am grateful and thankful" in Nehiyawewin. I have claimed this section to acknowledge the critical and decolonizing work of scholars in the realms of Indigenous theory and research methods, gender, sexuality and queer theory, identity politics, and Indigenous feminism.

Chapter One, Part Two – Theory: An Eroticanalysis

Power in My Blood is an in-depth exploration of Indigenous erotica and shares how Indigenous erotica holds potential for decolonization and corporeal sovereignty and stands as a site of theoretical understanding. Making sense of the Indigenous erotic begins with a method for selecting, arranging, prioritizing, and legitimizing. The language of theory helps interpret, strategize, and organize, and determines the action to take place. As such, my theoretical approach begins with five recurring elements within Indigenous erotica: **gender** (decentering Western European tropes of femininity and masculinity); **re-imaginings**[19] (nonconformity, resistance, and subversion, and alternative ways of envisioning the past, present, and future); **relationship** (kinship ties to family and people and connection to the land and place); **ongoing collective** (language and culture through generational narratives, stories, communal language, and memory); and **corporeal sovereignty** (agency, authority over oneself, choice, and embodied sensations of everyday life). These five branches are used to explore expressions of erotica by Indigenous writers and artists in order to examine

[19] Oskâpew says, "Daniel Heath Justice and Qwo-Li Driskill are instrumental in this area of 're-imagining.' Driskill relates his reimagining: 'Instead of seeing decolonization as something that has fixed a definite goal, decolonial activism ask us to radically reimagine our futures' (70). Daniel Heath Justice's concept of 'Imagine Otherwise' has added to my understanding of nonconformity and resistance as decolonial strategies."

the potential that Indigenous erotica holds to reimagine our genders and sexualities as Indigenous peoples. Similar to Craig Womack's entreaty for Indigenous scholars to hold dialogue together, I'd like my thesis to be part of a larger conversation about Indigenous erotics and function as a "beginning rather than ending, more gauged toward encouraging tribal people to talk about literature rather than dictating the term of such dialogue" (2). It is not my intention to be definitive on what constitutes an Indigenous erotic methodology or theory (or even to state decisively what constitutes erotica); rather, I anticipate adding my theory and practice of eroticanalysis to the continuing dialogue on the Indigenous erotic along with Mark Rifkin, Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee), Deborah Miranda, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm (Anishnaabe of mixed ancestry from the Chippewas of Nawash First Nation), Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma), and Lisa Tatonetti, among others. My caveat would then read: These Indigenous research methods and eroticanalysis are an exploration of both transgression and transcendence meant to *continue* the vital discourse on finding solutions to address the oppression of, and end to the genocide against, Indigenous women, girls, and genderful people.

Chapter One, Part Three – Epistemology

Epistemology is the study or theory of knowledge. How do we know something? How do we think about or know this reality? How do we know what is real? My epistemology is a Nehiyaw'iskwew Way of Thinking and Knowing, and it is central to my thesis. My Nehiyaw'iskwew Way of Thinking and Knowing places me within a complex web of relationships. In order to honour those relationships, I engage in certain protocols: locality, textual resistance, ceremony, and relational accountability. While thinking about the organization of my research, it soon became clear that many of my terms – "methodology," "theory," "epistemology," "ontology," and "axiology" – often interweave with and inform other praxes. For instance, axiology, which outlines my ethical and moral realm, consists of relational accountability and ceremony. Both of these elements also make up my

epistemology. Ontology – our assumptions and understandings about how the world is made – also relies heavily upon locality and ceremony.

Chapter Two – The Erotic

Chapter Two mobilizes the Indigenous erotic methodology of *Power in My Blood* with a study of the terms of the erotic and an exploration of Indigenous literary and visual works of erotica, and demonstrates the practice of my eroticanalysis. An inquiry into the diverse foundations of the erotic as a site of power situates my own work within the larger body of knowledge of the erotic. I hope to demonstrate, intrepid reader, the erotic's potential and its capacity to challenge and reform colonial perceptions of masculine and feminine gender norms, social roles, and responsibilities. I anticipate that an entire chapter dedicated to the erotic will *arouse* you and your imagination and *stimulate* your senses enough then to engage intimately with chapters three and four. An eroticanalysis of poems, short narratives, and visual art demonstrates the practice of the erotic, a liberating process through which Indigenous women, girls, and genderful people can become powerful agents of their own bodies. *Power in My Blood,* influenced by Audre Lorde's fundamental work on the erotic, reminds us that the erotic is a site of potential and power, and a site to challenge oppressive gender practices. As well, the erotic also speaks to the possibilities of realizing the power of Indigenous women's moontime (menstruation). Embracing the erotic enables women to bring together *all* aspects of themselves – a union of mind, body, and spirit. The Indigenous erotic must include the cycle of moontime, as an energy grounding us in our bodies and centering ourselves within our cycles. This power that women have has been eroded and suppressed by Christian theological influences,[20] along with the perspective that menstrual cycles are ritually unclean and contaminating. The rejection of moontime is a direct rejection of our own autonomy and corporeal sovereignty as Indigenous women, and

[20] Oskâpew says, "Christians are not the only ones who have deemed menstruation a negative. Other religions, such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism, have all placed restrictions and prohibitions on menstruating women" (Guterman et al. 2007).

leads to the question – explored in chapters three and four – "What sites of potential does Indigenous erotics in literary works hold, and how can this lead to corporeal sovereignty?"

Chapter Three – Niska

Chapter three is an eroticanalysis of the character of Niska in *Three Day Road*. I embraced this character in *Three Day Road* due to the strength and power I recognized in her, and what Niska's character provoked in me as a Nehiyaw'iskwew academic. An intimate and careful exploration of Niska represents and supports two main elements of the potential within the Indigenous erotic: relationship (kinship ties to family and people and connection to the land and place) and corporeal sovereignty. Niska is a warrior whose corporeal sovereignty and power are expressed through her moontime. Niska's moontime does not diminish men's strength or desecrate sacred objects; it is not unclean, impure, or hidden shamefully from public view. In my reading, Niska's moontime symbolizes the power of the erotic, and Chapter Three reveals how the textual description of Niska embodies aspects of the erotic. As a leader and a powerful woman of ceremony and medicines, Niska is a healer and a visionary. She is self-determining, physically and mentally strong, admired, feared, and respected. She remains inside her own Nehiyaw'iskwew territory, sidestepping colonialist boundaries. The depiction of the spiritual essence of Niska, her physical body, and her lived experiences exemplify the practice of the erotic. Indigenous erotics has the potential to address the struggle for justice for Indigenous women and create space of self-determination and empowerment for change. Through Niska I explore the possibilities of female erotic power.

Chapter Four – Tarsa

Finally, Chapter four is an eroticanalysis of Justice's character Tarsa'Deshae (Tarsa) in the first book of a trilogy called *Kynship.* While this book reveals many aspects of the erotic, my main focus is the character of a Red Thorn Warrior named Tarsa. In the same way that

Niska embraces the erotic potential through her corporeal sovereignty and kinship connections, Tarsa and the other Red Thorn Warriors are empowered through the synchronization of the Warriors' moontime. Their warrior sisterhood relationship is harmonized and intensified during their moontime. As with Niska, Tarsa and her companions intrigue me because of the fact that these formidable characters do not consider their moontime as a weakness or a negative power. I see great potential in these characters for rearticulating the intimate landscape of Indigenous women's bodies, for choosing for ourselves the ways in which we can celebrate and honour our bodies. In addition to these powerful fictional characters, Kim Anderson (Cree/Métis), Emma LaRocque and others also rearticulate the importance and power of certain spiritual ceremonies and corporeal teachings regarding puberty and coming-of-age rituals. As such, they reframe a significant part of Indigenous erotica that provides alternate understandings and powerful guidance to Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. Neglecting to honour all aspects of womanhood allows for the continued oppression of bodies and the silencing of the voices of Indigenous women. Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna/Sioux/Scottish) explains:

> Women are perceived to be possessed of a singular power, most vital during menstruation.... Indians do not perceive signs of womanness as contamination; rather they knew them as so powerful that other "medicines" may be cancelled by the very presences of the power. (76)

The continued silencing and oppressing of Indigenous women's voices guarantees that sovereign Indigenous nations will never exist; like Boyden's character of Niska, Justice's warriors offer the possibility of power and self-determination for Indigenous women.

Chapter Five – Ekosi Mâka (meaning "That's it; so long; good-bye, I'd better be going" in Nehiyawewin)

My final chapter is not exactly a conclusion, so I have taken the liberty, intrepid reader, of renaming this last chapter Ekosi Mâka. This is not so much a summed up conclusion of events as, in fact, a beginning – a place that gives rise to even more questions, and to continued practice of the erotic. Similar to one of the aspects of moontime, it is a reflective time.[21] Ekosi Mâka also acts as an agent of accountability, asking, "Has this research done what it set out to do?" Further, "What does future work include?" I'm done apologizing for being unwilling to create what Paul Heilker[22] defines as a "logically exclusive, linear progression to a predetermined end" that serves to "move the reader to one and only one conclusion" (4).

and on that note
shall we begin,
curious reader?

[21] Oskâpew says, "Moontime teachings are not in the purview of *Power in My Blood*, nor am I able to convey any of these teachings; however, what I can say is this: as I have charted my own moontime, I have found that there is a period of time during my moontime when I feel the need to isolate myself. I take this time to reflect on my place in the world; my thoughts often turn to my children, family, friends, community, the environment, and even my career."
[22] Oskâpew says, "Heilker is a modern critic of the thesis/support form. See *The Essay."*

CHAPTER ONE - STRATEGY OF INQUIRY

1) METHODOLOGY – A Nehiyaw'iskwew Research Method

My dissertation begins with a methodology that I call a Nehiyaw'iskwew research method, and not research questions or a thesis statement. My methodology consists of two parts, embodied knowledge and a literature review. This methodological approach produces research and knowledge that are bound to Indigenous ways of knowing and being and directly related to present-day struggles and resistance against colonization. Employing a methodology founded in Indigenous principles and methods[23] generates knowledge that makes sense in terms of our social realities and lived experience. This thesis may unsettle those readers accustomed to the conventional ways of dissertation standards.[24] Like the Oskâpewsak sections, this strategy-of-inquiry chapter serves as a roadmap for both myself and you, the reader, to understand the paradigm that guides my research and the tools and techniques I have used in the gathering of knowledge. Similar to Shawn Wilson's (Nehiyawe) Indigenous research method, I hope my strategy of inquiry remains open to change. Wilson states, "I hoped to remain open to any change that the situation required. In addition to the process changing in order to achieve the end goal, the end goal also changed to meet the emerging process" (40).

Here, embodied knowledge or lived bodily knowledge includes six experiences: 1) "Tante Ohci Kiya?" 2) the play *Pig Girl*; 3) the memorial art installation *Walking With Our Sisters* (WWOS); 4) the Gondola story; 5) Teaching Erotica (the experiential process of creating and teaching a course for the Faculty of Native Studies called Indigenous Erotica NS280);

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[23] Oskâpew says, "'Indigenous ways of knowing, principles and methods' such as the term, 'All My Relations' that are discussed throughout *Power in My Blood*."

[24] Oskâpew says, "I've dedicated a section in Nitataminan to discuss the 'conventional approach', but for now just understand that I mean *the* research approach that is generally recognized and legitimized in Western academics."

and, finally, 6) other cultural experiences. These embodied knowledges are not all neatly presented in Chapter One – no indeed, intrepid reader. I've placed these lived experiences (in italics) strategically, but mostly intuitively, throughout *Power in My Blood,* to serve as gentle reminders of the Indigenous erotic territory you inhabit, and to find the relationships among the texts in order to build and corroborate our discussion on the erotic. For example, the story of the play *Pig Girl* is placed strategically within the Epistemology section and nested within "Relational Accountability" (one of four elements defining my epistemological approach). My experience with the play *Pig Girl* is the perfect opportunity to teach you, intrepid reader, how relational accountability works (or doesn't work) in practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section serves more as a literature reconnaissance than a review. My journey commenced with one simple question: "If this is my body, where are my stories?" So began my search of the Indigenous erotic, beginning with Indigenous expressions and Indigenous understandings of histories and contemporary realities of gender and sexual identities, sex, sensuality, and sexuality. Even though these narratives began to form naturally into particular groupings, I needed a way to make sense of these discoveries. My strategy used the work of Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers, and had two steps: first, I reflected upon my current expertise in Native Studies; second, I sought out new insights, relevant critical theories, and methodologies to help make sense of my findings. My research journey toward Indigenous histories and understandings of sensuality, sex, sexuality, and gender (leading to the erotic) is delivered to you, intrepid reader, in the following way; **1) Survivor Narratives** (accounts demonstrating sexual experiences of pain, shame, grief, and rage – and sometimes healing – by survivors); **2) Moral Guides** (fictional and non-fictional narratives about gender, sexuality, and sex that function as "teaching" or "guiding"' stories); **3) Expressions in Indigenous Erotica** (Indigenous expressions of the erotic through literary and visual work); and finally, **4) Nitataminan**

(acknowledging and discussing the past and present ways in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers have helped me understand and engage in these texts).

1) SURVIVOR NARRATIVES

"Survivor narratives" express the historical legacy of sexual repression and violence against Indigenous peoples and disclose the difficult histories of sexual violence and abuse in residential schools. While the scope of my research does not include a thorough investigation of survivor narratives, this section remains a crucial part of my journey, and provides valuable insight into the forces that regulate Indigenous sex, gender, and sexualities. The brutal legacy of colonial rule and residential schools has oppressed the sensuality and beauty of our sexuality and censored Indigenous systems of sex and gender, effectively silencing and shaming the erotic voices of Indigenous peoples. The Survivor Narratives grouping has the largest proportion of written work, and includes countless stories of residential school survivors. These narratives are responsive/reactionary pieces that acknowledge, answer, and oppose the marginalized, dispossessed narratives about Indigenous people. In her book *Taking Back Our Spirits*, the late Jo-Ann Episkenew (Métis)[25] relates that many of these narratives serve as political statements, as much as they provide a way of spiritual healing from the past trauma. Former AFN Grand Chief Phil Fontaine (Nehiyawe), himself a residential school survivor, bluntly relates the rationale for telling these stories: "The motive for disclosure is, simply, to stop our people from killing themselves" (7). Basil Johnston (Member of the Cape Croker First Nation Neyaashiinigmiing) asserts that "[t]he invocation of residential school history works as a creative element in fueling provocative visions of growth, healing and change" (7). Sam McKegney's *Magic Weapons* and healing resources such as *Aboriginal Healing in Canada: Studies in Therapeutic Meaning and Practice* (Aboriginal Healing Foundation) reveal the social

[25] Oskâpew says, "Hiy hiy Jo-Ann for all of the powerful knowledge you have left for us in this world."

implications of these discourses. That is, these narratives function politically, revealing how the burden has been placed upon Indigenous people to "heal" from the trauma of residential schools on a schedule acceptable to the dominant society. These texts demonstrate that healing is a process that takes on diverse forms and has individual timelines. The following are a few examples of survivor narratives within my literature review. *Porcupines and China Dolls* by Robert Arthur Alexie (Gwich'in) speaks to the devastating psychological and physical effects of residential school abuses. This book is based upon the journeys of a group of Gwich'in (Dene) men who had been sexually abused by a residential school priest, Tom Kinney, and relates how they came to terms with their lifelong pain. Written in raw and graphic language, these narratives symbolically confront the demons that have haunted them since their time in residential school. Their coping mechanisms include suicide, alcohol and drugs, counseling, and hypersexuality – sometimes all of the above. For some of these men, sex is used like a weapon, a touchstone to convince themselves and others of their hypermasculine heterosexuality. They believe the quintessential male has numerous sex partners, and are convinced that promiscuity acts as a cleansing agent to excise, scour, and clean the mental and spiritual wounds that have stemmed from their sexual abuse. In a futile attempt to forget and/or reconcile their abuse, these Gwich'in men "told of how they became sluts to show they were men. Real men fucked their brains out, and that's what they did. They fucked anything that moved" (211). These men are in a state of constant, combative engagement, and these texts often invoke metaphors of violence and war by using words like weapons, warfare, battle, conqueror, bullets, warriors, wounds, armour, word arrows, etc. Similarly, the poetry of Chrystos (Menominee) implores Indigenous peoples to "make your life a weapon against exploitation. It does not matter that we may not win the war to save our mother. It matters that we fight honourably for her. In fighting them, we preserve our own [lives] … Poetry is a great force for healing" (*Fire Power* 130). These brief examples of survivor narratives demonstrate that often, language used by survivors conjures violent images that seem to strike back against the attacker (colonizer).

In the following chapters, readers will soon understand that these are very different expressions of sex, sexuality, and gender from my findings in the realm of Indigenous erotica.

Healing is often a word that Indigenous authors and artists use to describe the "why" of their work. Norval Morrisseau (Anishnaabe) faced harsh criticism for his depiction of sacred stories and Anishnaabe spirituality in his paintings. He defended his right to paint these images by citing a need for healing. He exclaimed, "Why am I alive? To heal you guys who are more screwed up than I am. How can I heal you? With colour. These are the colours you dreamt about one night. One day I hope society will use colour therapy instead of psychiatry" (Morrisseau interview). In his way, Morrisseau expressed the meaning of his work as a healing mechanism for other Indigenous people. While healing has occurred for some, the majority of survivors and their children still suffer as a result of the lack of culpability accepted by churches or governments regarding their involvement in residential schools.

As I continue to use this term – healing – I should give a brief overview of the federal government's concept of healing and reconciliation. Beginning in the 1980s, survivors of residential schools began to demand accountability from government and churches, who were brought to court by survivors acting both individually and in groups. In 1990, just after the Oka standoff, Phil Fontaine, the then-head of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, shocked the nation as he spoke candidly about his experience in residential schools. As the court cases against churches and government mounted, in 1996 the final Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) report was released. Based on the recommendations from the report and the class action suits, an Aboriginal Healing Fund was established by the federal government in 1998 ("Indigenous Foundations"). Many felt this gesture was a mere band-aid to the situation and that this $350 million government plan did not address the intergenerational trauma of residential schools. Then, in 2005, the Assembly of First Nations

(AFN) filed a lawsuit against the federal government and churches, and settled the largest class action settlement in Canadian history ("Indigenous Foundations"). As a result, the churches and the Canadian federal government agreed to pay monetary compensation and create supports and measures like the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*[26] (TRC) for the healing of survivors and their families. The Prime Minister's *Statement of Apology* in 2008 acknowledged and apologized for the Canadian federal government's involvement in residential schools. Since its inception, the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF) has supported hundreds of successful healing projects across Canada; however, in September 2014, after 16 years, the AHF ceased operations. As well, in 2014, Edmonton hosted the last of seven national events held by *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission.* Did this mean that Indigenous people ravaged by the intergenerational trauma of residential schools had now been healed? That the settler citizens of Canada and Indigenous nations had reconciled? No. In fact, there remains a deep gulf – in terms of both understanding the concept of reconciliation and healing *and the actions required* for this – among the federal government, settler citizens, and Indigenous peoples. The apology and reconciliatory gestures made by the federal government, and many churches, have been met with mixed reactions.

David Garneau (Métis), in his article "Imaginary Space of Conciliation and Reconciliation," questions the framework of the "Truth and *Conciliation* model" (36). He critiques the TRC as a controlled framework in which survivors are encouraged to "confess" their secrets and sins, or their experience in "being sinned upon" (Garneau 36) – as thought that sin stemmed from individuals, and not institutions founded on genocidal policy. Garneau questions the possibility of reconciliation when Indigenous bodies and land are still being violated and oppressed. How can we reconcile the experience of residential schools when what is left of

[26] Oskâpew says, "With all my respect to the victims of abuse, their loved ones, the three Commissioners, and all the people who do good healing work, this critique, which includes that of *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission,* is a critique of the federal government. It is not meant to take away from the healing and restitution that many survivors and their families have experienced as a result of the TRC."

our traditional lands and bodies is still being exploited and desecrated? Garneau claims that the state seems to forget that reconciliation has to take into account this continued oppression. He argues, for example, against the representation of "[t]he residential school era, for example, as an unfortunate deviation,"… rather than as one planned strategy among many in "the perpetual colonial struggle to contain and control Aboriginal people, territories, and resources" (35).

For many residential school survivors, the disclosure of personal stories – on their own terms – has been essential for the healing process in addition, or as an alternative, to the TRC model. A survivor himself, Tomson Highway (Nehiyawe) loosely based his book *Kiss of the Fur Queen* on his residential school experience. Two brothers, Jeremiah, also known as Champion, and Gabriel Okimasis are forced to dwell in the hostile world of a Catholic residential school, and are permanently wounded by their experiences of violence and sexual abuse. An interview with Tomson Highway also reveals that writing plays became a source of healing. Highway states, "The play [*Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*] shows the potential for healing in terms of transformation, which comes as a consequence of living through the cultural nightmare and working to discover the possibility of a new beginning" (Wilson 1990). Highway shares how the process of healing can happen, by first acknowledging the pain – that is, "living through the cultural nightmare." It is the working-through of the nightmare that makes a new start possible; it is the "possibility of a new beginning." Highway doesn't downplay the horror of residential schools, or the realities of the continuing trauma that results, but he remains optimistic.

In another survivor narrative, Agnes Grant edits a book called *Finding My Talk: How Fourteen Canadian Native Women Reclaimed Their Lives After Residential School.* Just as these women talk candidly about their own trauma and personal journeys after residential school, so, too, does Basil Johnson in his book *Indian School Days*. Through her powerful poetry, Louise Bernice Halfe (Nehiyawe) eloquently draws upon the powerful voices of

ancestral grandmothers to speak to the sexual abuses suffered by children. An excerpt from her book *Blue Marrow* speaks to the atrocities committed in residential schools:

> We were the ones, Nosisim, who hid the Bundles, held council when we learned how those brothers lifted their skirts to spill their devils into our sons' night. And did they think they suffered as they burned, screaming against our flame? (32)

Halfe speaks to her grandchild (Nosisim) as a mother who bore the pain of sending her child, her grandson's father, to residential school. As the grandmother, she graphically describes the sexual abuse perpetrated by the priests against her son, "spill[ing] their devils into our sons' night," (32), forming an intergenerational trilogy of hurt and pain. We can also gauge by this text that there was some agency here on the part of Aboriginal women, as these atrocities happened when, she says, "We were the ones, Nosisim, who hid the Bundles, held council …" (32). As much as these narratives act as tools spreading awareness of the historical violence committed against Indigenous people through assimilationist policies, these survivor narratives also provide accounts of agency that challenge the more simplistic depictions of victimization.

Racialized violence did not begin with residential schools, but with the fur trade, when many Indian women became "country wives" to Hudson's Bay Company men. In many cases, country wives were left and forgotten when a more appropriate (white) wife arrived or when her valuable Indian trading connections were no longer needed. Survivor narratives also include stories of these marginalized and forgotten women. As Marilyn Dumont (Cree/Métis) demonstrates, Indian women in fur trade history are linked with the current realities of the violence against and deaths of Aboriginal women. The country wives have become our "stolen sisters," also remembered as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW). These texts are survivor narratives, and tend to focus on the impact of colonization. In Dumont's book *that tongued belonging*, she addresses the injustices against

these Indigenous women: "[T]his is for Governor Simpson's three discarded wives whose heavy brown hips bore his babies for the fur trade … this is for the wives whose names were not important enough to mention" (3).

Dumont also addresses the continued vilification of Indian women in her poem called *if we are pictured too easily,*

> … if we are too easily pictured
> a certain kind of woman
> it's because our denigration
> started long ago
> a tradition of gentlemen
> explorers, fur traders, company men
> investing little more than the fickle heart of commerce
> in our company
> so that, now, when a twelve-year-old Indian girl is raped in Saskatchewan
> or when an Indian woman is set fire in Edmonton
> or when many Indian women disappear on a pig farm in Port Coquitlam
> our skin too, crawls from their violation
> and we breathe an air heavy with death song
> while our grandmothers rattle the doors of justice. (4)

Dumont's compelling poem demonstrates the harsh past of Indigenous women at the hands of "a tradition of gentlemen / explorers, fur traders" (4) who often used and discarded the women, "investing little more than the fickle heart of commerce" (4) in their relationships. Dumont connects this history to the current realities of sexual violence against Indigenous women and girls: "…a twelve-year-old Indian girl is raped … / … an Indian woman is set on fire … / … Indian women disappear…. (4)"

Both Halfe and Dumont also acknowledge the powerful role of grandmothers in their poems. For Dumont, the "grandmothers rattle the doors of justice" (4), indicating a powerful need for retribution; for Halfe, grandmothers "hid the Bundles" – protecting

sacred and spiritual items – and "held council" (32). These narratives demonstrate intergenerational resiliency and the legacies of strength among Indigenous women.

The Named and Unnamed is a video installation based on Rebecca Belmore's (Anishnaabe) street performance, called *Vigil*. Performed on the corner of Gore and Cordova streets in Vancouver, *Vigil* pays homage and brings awareness to the missing and murdered Aboriginal women of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Some books, however, such as Chrystos's *Fire Power*, root their work in their writers' own personal challenges. Chrystos's poetry speaks for those who are discriminated against or who have faced violence due to their sexuality. Her poetry also becomes very personal as she recalls with amazing clarity her violently abusive childhood upbringing. Texts such as these can also be classified as survivor narratives, borne by the need to address sexual abuse and violence. Yet these writings can also be seen as very political. Her voice is twice politicized, as she articulates Indigenous-specific struggles within GLBTQ2 identities.

Spirituality is often connected to healing, and also often related to the political. Sometimes there is no way to know the consequence of releasing such stories into the world. Anthony Apakark Thrasher (Inuvialuit), for example, did not intend for his autobiography *Skid Row Eskimo* to inspire hope at all; he wrote in order to tell his story to future generations, to pass along the lessons he learned while living in the city (McKegney 61). Similarly, in *Indian School Days,* Johnston explains the unexpectedness of his healing after his experience at the Spanish Residential School in northern Ontario: "Why did I weep? Shame! Guilt! I don't know. Did I feel relief? I don't know. Did I feel better? I don't know" (ix). These stories are told for many reasons – health, healing, growth, change – as well as for instruction. These texts orient themselves around the survivors' perspectives and are a critical piece in shaping the collective understanding of Canadian history. Understandably, these stories link pain, anger, and shame with sexuality, but they also do more than that. These narratives signal to me, and, I hope, to you, intrepid reader, that Indigenous peoples'

written expressions signal self-determination. These texts send a message to the world (and to Indigenous peoples themselves) that we continue to survive despite the brutal legacy of colonial oppression. Reimagining Indigenous sexuality and gender begins with an understanding of our past.

2) MORAL GUIDES

In my search for Indigenous narratives on sexuality, gender, and sensuality, there emerged a second assemblage of narratives, ones that seemed to facilitate the transference of knowledge. Metaphorical or literal, these stories are meant to teach the next generation their roles and responsibilities and are also socializing mechanisms that relay the ethics and principles of the community. While many of these moral guiding narratives are only accessible through the oral storytelling tradition, some are in print. For example, Kim Anderson's article "Honouring the Blood of the People: Berry Fasting in the Twenty-First Century," outlines the resurgence of the berry fast, a coming-of-age ceremony that people say originated with the Kanien'keha':ka.[27] The article begins with a story and includes teachings about the roles and responsibilities surrounding sex and sexuality for young girls as they reach puberty. With a focus on relaying critical information regarding the conduct and expectations of a good human being, these narratives also transfer knowledge to the next generation on gender roles and responsibilities.

While most of the *literal* guiding narratives, such as Anderson's article, are written by Indigenous scholars and teachers, I find many of the *metaphorical* moral guides in print having questionable origins and purpose. These are problematic. For example, the print version of the story often called "The Girl Who Married a Bear" [28] has had the sex and sexuality excised from it altogether. In the oral version of the story, a woman insults the Bear people after stepping in a particularly large pile of bear scat. Hearing her contempt and

[27] Oskâpew says, "These may also be known as Mohawk Peoples."
[28] Oskâpew says, "Under various titles, this story is a renowned narrative found in many Indigenous cultures within Canada, from coast to coast."

disrespect, she is then tricked into having a sexual intercourse with a bear, resulting in bear cub children. As the story goes on, she falls in love and comes to understand the ways of the Bear people. The endings vary, but ultimately she is forced to sacrifice someone she loves – sometimes her children, brothers or bear mate.

The guiding principle of the story embodies the term "All My Relations." This term refers to the belief in one's sensory and bodily connection to everything around one; it is the unity we experience with and the responsibility we have to every living thing. It is the belief that everything is alive, that we are all related and equal; our respect extends from pebbles to dragonflies, from birch trees to rivers, from the teen asking for change on the street to your sister – no one is above another. Moral narratives reflect the concept that "we are all related" and that our actions *and inactions* have consequences.

As the woman in this story did not respect the Bear people, she was given teachings in the form of experiential learning.[29] The story allows the listeners to learn about the principles of "All My Relations" through the woman's mistakes, without having to experience her trials and tribulations. In the oral version, the woman doesn't officially and legally "marry" the bear at all; she has erotic, sweaty, hairy sex with the bear. Depending on the storyteller, this scene can get quite steamy. In the sanitized version of the story, the woman (female) literally "marries" the (male) bear, and it is the sanctity of heterocouplehood and matrimonial union – not sexual intercourse – that results in bear children. Print versions of such metaphorical moral tales are often altered to eliminate traces of sex and sexuality to reflect the more palatable Christian ideals of procreation. If the bear weren't such an integral aspect of the story, it's likely he would have been modified in this sanitized version to assume a human shape, thereby denying the existence of relationships among people, animals, and the environment. For many Indigenous people,

[29] Oskâpew says, "Experiential learning is learning through observed and lived experiences."

the world is understood as having a natural interconnectedness, and all those relationships must be seen as a whole.

In Rifkin's reading of the novel *King of the Tie Snakes* by Craig Womack, for instance, he argues that the oral tradition of storytelling can be used as a means to resist Christian ideals and to remap our own Indigenous traditions. He states:

> [T]he novel illustrates not only how oral tradition can serve as a vehicle for reconceptualizing Creek identity but how it offers a means of linking seemingly disparate struggles across time, expanding the meaning of politics and peoplehood by drawing attention to what has been submerged and made "secret." (2011, 297)

Like the story of the woman who "marries" a bear, many of the metaphorical moral stories seen in print today are sanitized, watered-down shells of their originals. Though I struggle with the idea of a "legitimate truth" or "authentic past,"[30] I think it fair to conclude that the original stories contained richly detailed, vibrant, and complex worldviews that are not reflected in many print versions today. The story "The Girl Who Married the Bear" is just one example of the de-eroticizing tendencies of the settler state. But as Anderson has done in her "telling" of the revitalization of coming-of-age ceremonies, Indigenous authors and storytellers can take steps to recall, reimagine, and retell moral guiding stories to reflect *our* beliefs, concepts, and worldviews. In his book *Red on Red,* Womack argues, "To exist as a nation, the community needs a perception of nationhood, that is stories … that help them imagine who they are as a people, how they came to be, and what cultural values they wish to preserve" (26).

3) INDIGENOUS EROTICA

[30] Oskâpew says, "Using the word authentic in this context, advocates for a version of a pure, unadulterated Indigenous past, thereby denying the idea that stories and people evolve and change over time. What I mean to say is that, Indigenous peoples have responded to positive and negative influences throughout a millennia. However, the negative influence of the settler state (and relatively current - the past 500 years) is so corrupt and dangerous that it has resulted in the near annihilation of our people."

As I searched for narratives about Indigenous sexuality, sex, and gender, I noted that the third category included texts that did not "fit" into my original groupings of survivor narratives and moral guides. When I read the sensual writings of Louis Esme Cruz's (Mi'kmaq) "Birth Song for Muin, in Red," Cherie Dimaline's (Ojibwe/Métis) novel *Red Rooms*, and Gregory Scofield's (Métis) book *Love Medicine and One Song,* as well as other erotic works by Alootook Ipellie (Inuit), Maria Campbell (Métis), Joy Harjo, Daniel Heath Justice, and Richard Van Camp (Dogrib), I wondered why these Indigenous authors were writing"? At first, I vainly attempted to pigeonhole them into my somewhat limited criteria and knowledge. Then I remembered an article by David Newhouse (Onondaga) called "Magic and Joy: Traditional Aboriginal Views on Sex and Sexuality." His article recounts his own exploration of Indigenous sex and sexuality and how his research began in earnest when he became Chair of the Joint National Committee on Aboriginal Aids Education and Prevention (2). Newhouse came across findings from a co-piloted study done by the University of Toronto and the Chiefs of Ontario. For Newhouse, the standout in the findings was the assertion that of the 658 Aboriginal people interviewed across Ontario, 57 percent described sex with one word: "magical" (4). The implications of these findings demonstrate that despite the catastrophic damage wrought by the colonial power upon Indigenous sex, sexuality, and gender, Indigenous people still celebrate their sexuality.

In addition, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm's *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica* led me to many other texts – including the love and lust poetics of Chrystos. With an obvious absence of residential school abuse horrors, these narratives were truly sensual and celebratory. They reveled in sassiness, power, sensuality, laughter, sex, magic, joy, desire, love, and lust. This is what I had been searching for. While Chrystos and other Indigenous writers have been writing Indigenous erotica for decades, these publications were once rare and difficult to find. Today, a growing corpus of erotica by Indigenous writers not only rejoices in the pure magic, sensuality, and unadulterated joy of sex, but has opened up a door to discuss alternative ways of seeing gender, sexuality, and sex. These texts are explorations

of sensuality and contain Indigenous voices sharing narratives of pleasure, desire, kinship, sex, and sexuality.

Thomas King (Cherokee) uses the term "associational literatures" (188) to describe the need for Indigenous peoples to create literature to relay current cultural information. For King, contemporary literatures – and I liberally include Indigenous erotica in this realm – are essential to the growth of Indigenous literature; they

> help to remind us of the continuing values of our cultures and reinforce the notion that, in addition to the usable past that the concurrence of oral literature and traditional history provides us with, we also have an active present marked by cultural tenacity and a viable future which may well organize itself around major revivals of language, philosophy and spiritualism. (188)

In essence, associational literatures such as Indigenous erotica function as an approach to cultural resurgence and revitalization with the ultimate intention of decolonization. The entire impetus for *Without Reservation: Indigenous Erotica* is to celebrate the "loving, sexual, 'dirty', outrageous, ribald intimacies of humanity and and sexuality that we all crave" (xii). In his anthology on Native sex and sexuality called *Me Sexy*, Drew Hayden Taylor (Ojibway) states that many of the negative stories about Aboriginal people in the media have truths within them, but do not adequately reflect "the vast ocean of Aboriginal sexuality" (3). I began to realize that Indigenous erotica inhabited a space somewhat different from any other narratives on Indigenous sexuality, sex and gender. While the heart of these stories is nestled within a body of Indigenous sensuality and desire, the texts do not necessarily focus or depend on the Indigeneity of the characters for their "Indigenousness." For example, told from the viewpoint of a hotel's cleaning lady, Cherie Dimaline's *Red Rooms* consists of stories *with* Indigenous characters; however, the characters' problems do not intersect with some of the prevailing themes of the intergenerational effects of residential school, drugs and alcohol, suicide, or poverty.

Instead, Dimaline's urban-centered Indigenous characters face very different challenges. Amongst these characters is Natalie, who reads the diary of an Indigenous woman whose life of ceremony and culture has Natalie questioning her own connection to her Indigenous heritage. There is also Constance, a curatorial expert who ends her one-sided relationship with a married man. A character called Photographer comes to realize that his sense of place and belonging is the connection he has to his people. Dimaline's characters struggle, prosper, flourish, and die within the contemporary urban world in which many Indigenous people live today. Fresh, innovative Indigenous characters indicate a shift in contemporary writings. These texts demonstrate that a contemporary "Indian existence" – full of desire and sexuality – can exist outside the damaging effects of the residential school experience. They indicate that Indigenous peoples participate in all walks of life, enjoy all the sensualities of the everyday, and circulate in multiple levels of mainstream society.

We also see erotica in visual art: from Shawn Hunt's (Heiltsuk) *Hotbox* to Norval Morrisseau's entire series of erotica paintings. The growing corpus of Indigenous erotica affirms the growing strength of Indigenous empowerment. Indigenous people have come a long way in reclaiming our erotic selves. In fact, just 40 years ago an exhibition of Indigenous erotica by Daphne Odjig (Odawa, Potawatomi, English heritage) was shut down. Odjig's exhibit was censured and shut down by the police, who claimed the show was too sexual in nature. In 1968, Odjig was commissioned to paint a series of erotic illustrations for a medical doctor named Herbert T. Schwartz; he had collected erotic stories from various northern communities and asked Odjig to illustrate his book *Tales From the Smokehouse*. The exhibition of these paintings in 1974 was prohibited and subsequently closed down by police (Bailey). Despite these early hurdles, however, visual artists and writers continue to disrupt the current colonial narratives on Indigenous gender and sexuality. To date, there have been two highly successful Indigenous erotica exhibits: Lee Ann Martin and Morgan Wood's (Stony Mountain Cree) co-curated exhibit in 1999 called *Reclaiming Desire,*

Exposed: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art; and an exhibit co-curated by Kwiaahwah Jones (Naasagas Xaaydagaay clan on the Haida side and Ganada clan on her Nisga'a side) and Gwaai Edenshaw's (Tsaahl from Haida Gwaii) in 2014, called *RezErect: Native Erotica*. Indigenous erotica like Daphne Odjig's painting *Big One and the Bad Medicine Woman,* depicted in both *Tales from the Smokehouse* and within Morgan and Martin's erotica exhibit, demonstrates two aspects of the erotic. The first that the erotic is a site of potential for loosening the current grip of settler colonial logics of heteronormative sexuality and restrictive gender binaries. Jones of *Rez: Erect* adds this: "Our culture on the Northwest Coast is so holistic, we don't categorize things like they do traditionally in the western world and the perspective comes out pretty clear in exploring erotica on the Northwest Coast" (Lewis).

The second aspect of the erotic is that to Indigenous peoples, sex, sexuality, and the erotic were not seen as separate categories for human expression, but were integrated into everyday life. When Peter Goddard, a newspaper reporter from *The Toronto Star*, asked Odjig how audiences responded to her intensely erotic paintings, she said, "People were shocked at the time, although things have changed now. The native community was the least shocked of all, though. We were brought up as children to accept these things. Sexual matters were a part of life" (Odjig).

(Fig.1.1)

The image above is Shawn Hunt's *Hotbox* (which I discuss later in *Power in My Blood*). But before you read what I THINK of the art, I want you to take some paper and write down all that you see.
Write down what you feel when you see this art.
Questions to consider: Do you want to touch it? Why? How do you think it smells or tastes? What does it mean?
Keep these thoughts for later.

Finally, two of my favourite examples of Indigenous erotica are embodied within two Indigenous warrior women characters, Niska from *Three Day Road* and and Tarsa from *Kynship*. I have dedicated chapters 3 and 4 to them. Curious reader, you may wonder why I

have devoted two entire chapters to characters who, at first glance, may seem to have less-significant roles than other actors in these books. The following is a brief explanation of my choice. From my very first readings of *Three Day Road*, and *Kynship*, I was inexorably drawn to the characterizations of Niska and Tarsa. I recognized visceral aspects of these women, their captivating personality traits and compelling experiences, in Indigenous women I knew, and even within myself. Their traits seemed to be an amalgamation of the strength (and weakness), intelligence, intuition, perseverance, and power embodied within both present and ancestral Indigenous women I have known and loved. Niska and Tarsa mirrored the same

fierce love, unwavering loyalty, and protectiveness

for kin and relations as the women in my family. As Niska and Tarsa struggle for corporeal sovereignty and engage in personal battles against the rising forces of a colonial threat, their failures and successes are heartbreakingly familiar. Niska and Tarsa are women warriors who, like Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk today, endeavour to *find* and to *claim* a space in a rapidly changing world. For me, the struggle for corporeal sovereignty begins with my body and choices about my body. The exclusionary tactics of denying, silencing, and denigrating my body – including my beautifully powerful internal rhythms – in ceremony and within cultural teachings are oppressive and unacceptable. Niska and Tarsa's moontime experiences (although only mentioned briefly in the body of the texts) is a powerful indication that there are other ways of thinking about, celebrating, and fearing moontime. These considerations challenge the life-affirming, motherhood-indicating, and consequent nation-building standard of heterocolonial discourse. A deeper investigation, which began with a conversation with the author of *Kynship* and creator of Tarsa, Daniel Heath Justice, affirmed an Indigenous past that used the power of moontime in battle (Justice interview). Similarly, Niska's experiences reveal that moontime is not only a sign of

the capacity to give life, it also signifies the power to take life. The representations of these characters suggests what my body and mind had long suspected: that there is a profound power in moontime. Although these characters were created by Indigenous men, and the topic of moontime is by no means a large part of Boyden and Justice's storylines, the striking connections that exist in both characters regarding moontime are very important to my understanding of the Indigenous erotic. What can I learn from Indigenous men about moontime? What can they learn from me? Anishnaabe author and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg ancestry) encourages Indigenous learners to establish for themselves what is and is not valuable knowledge: "If bell hooks or Franz Fanon speaks to my heart as a Nishnaabekwe, as both do, then Nishnaabeg intelligence compels me to learn, share and embody **everything** I can from **every** teacher that presents themselves to me. Nishnaabeg intelligence *is* diversity – Nishnaabeg intelligence *as* diversity" (16). So, whatever Boyden and Justice's intentions, the female characters in their texts provide an important jumping-off point for me to discuss and explore the embodied knowledges that exist within the bloods[31] of Indigenous women, and, consequently, the potential power of the erotic for decolonization.

Chapter one is dedicated to explaining my strategy of inquiry (methodology, theory, and epistemological choices); chapters two, three, and four provide a more thorough eroticanalysis[32] of how visual and written representations of the erotic offer up ways to think about Indigenous sex and sexuality. These parts offer a type of counter-history, or reimaginings and alternative ways of envisioning the past, present, and future. I argue that Indigenous women can reclaim their corporeal sovereignty, and further, that Indigenous

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[31] Oskâpew says, "I pluralize *blood* to indicate both moontime blood and the blood flowing in our veins."
[32] Oskâpew says, "An eroticanalysis in theory and practice is fully defined in the next section, on page 75. Briefly, an eroticanalysis depends upon a sensuous embodiment of the text by the reader. This means that readers reflect deeply on their own thoughts, ideas, biases, and place as part of a holistic analysis of the text or visuals at hand. Readers are required to reflect on their relationship with the text and the relationships between the texts themselves."

authors and artists who express the erotic contribute to the decolonization of Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk.

4) NITATAMINAN
PART ONE

This section, intrepid reader, attempts to acknowledge those Indigenous scholars and knowledge keepers whose work(s) act as bridges to carry and lead me, and as elevators to raise my critical consciousness. If you find any glorious insights or wisdom within *Power in My Blood,* all credit should be given to the scholars whose benchmark research supported my understanding and articulation of the Indigenous erotic. If there are any inaccuracies, misrepresentations, unfair applications, or questionable leaps-of-faith in my use of their ideas and theories, I am entirely to blame.

My introduction to Indigenous scholars happened during my undergraduate work in the Faculty of Native Studies at the University of Alberta. I quickly became aware of scholars such as Womack, Episkenew, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Justice, and Robert Warrior whose work within the field of Indigenous literary criticism demonstrated the power and potential of the words of Indigenous authors. Words could be healing, used to mend the colonial legacies of pain, shame, and rage, as well as to build a sense of nationhood aspiring to Indigenous intellectual and land-based sovereignty. For me, these authors' works provided reassurance that we (as Indigenous scholars/writers) shared common goals: to ensure the survival and regeneration of Indigenous people, and to decolonize ourselves by working within an Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. Declarations of Indigenous identity (or any identity locators) while one is situated within an academic institution are not popular concepts within academia. Still, I felt emboldened, and also felt a sense of responsibility to assert my distinct Indigenous voice. Why? There is motive embedded in the words of Indigenous scholars and authors; consider the words of Chickasaw scholar Eber Hampton:

> One thing I want to say about research is that there is a motive. I believe the reason is emotional because we feel. We feel because we are hungry, cold, afraid, brave, loving, or hateful. We do what we do for reasons, emotional reasons. That is the engine that drives us. That is the gift of the Creator of Life. Life feels.… Feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise, and suppress that feeling at our peril and at the peril of those around us. Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual research is a goddam lie, it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans – feeling, living breathing, thinking humans – do research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to the people around us. (52)

Indigenous literature supports meaningful alternatives to the existing colonial discourse. Winona Wheeler (Ockekwi Sipi Cree) indicates that methodologies springing from Indigenous oral histories

> do not abide by conventional disciplinary boundaries. They are about relationships and generational continuity, and the package is holistic – they include religious teachings, metaphysical links, cultural insights, history, linguistic structures, literary and aesthetic form, and Indigenous "truths". (9)

Indigenous literature and accompanying literary criticism have encouraged me to engage in concepts deeply rooted within my own specific tribal identity; for me, this means Nehiyawak'iskwew concepts.

Further, Wilson's *Research as Ceremony* left an indelible mark on me and pushed me to think about a framework deeply rooted in ceremonial concepts, values and principles originating from my own Nehiyaw'iskwew experiences. As briefly mentioned in Tâwaw, an Indigenous methodological practice, specifically from a Nehiyaw'iskwew perspective, uses

many ways to locate the author. This includes conversations about ceremony, music, art, humour, song, language, cultural traditions, and stories. As such, this research is also enriched by academics such as Tuhiwai Smith from Aotearoa (New Zealand), Lightning, Wheeler, Marie Battiste (Mi'kmaw), and LaRocque. Their works recentre Indigenous knowledges within the academy, and express the need to draw links and provide connections through storytelling, language, experiences, and cultural traditions, with the ultimate goal of opening up a space for communicating alternative types of knowledges and different perspectives. Tuhiwai Smith argues that "Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviors as an integral part of methodology. The final product is always secondary to the community benefiting from the process, and in order for the process to happen, the researchers must locate themselves" (107). Tuhiwai Smith's influential book (edited with Leslie Brown and Susan Strega) *Research as Resistance: Critical, Indigenous, & Anti-Oppressive Approaches* and Wilson's *Research As Ceremony* examine the potentialities of Indigenous research methods and offer a re-visioning of critical pedagogies to include Indigenous knowledges. *Power in My Blood* reflects these earlier works that ground their work within Indigenous epistemologies. Wheeler shares the epistemological difference in Nehiyawe understandings; as she explains,

> Cree teachings, like Cree Stories/oral traditions, have no rigid beginnings or ending. Everyone's personal (his)stories interconnect and overlap, all are extensions of the past, and all are grounded in wâhkotowin, *kinship/relations*. According to Nehiyawiwihtamâwâkan, *Cree teachings, etymology*, we inherit relationships and obligations to the generations behind, among, and before us, to life on this earth as we know it, and to our homelands. (2)

This interconnectedness is also "our whole," to which Lightning refers, and includes the complexity of the connections among those parts. Lightning concludes that each chapter cannot be accurately understood if taken separately, synthesized, and then integrated

together; however, the chapters' collectivity provides an understanding of the whole. The logic of Lightning's understanding of Maskikiw Mâmtonehicikan, then, "values the whole, more than the sum of its parts" (Lightning 32). Alongside Walter Lightning, there are many Indigenous scholars who have been instrumental in recentring Indigenous knowledges within the academy.[33]

Tuhiwai Smith states the importance of decolonizing methodologies in her transformative work in Indigenous research methodologies and argues that it is essential for Indigenous people to immerse themselves in theory that is relevant to them, "grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an Indigenous person" (38). As well as making space for multiple truths and perspectives, the work of Tuhiwai Smith and scholars like her allows me to understand and consequently address the relationship deficits in academia and add to the growing field that promotes other ways of thinking about research. "Locating" myself integrates the spirit of orality within my Nehiyaw'iskwew writing into academic discourse, and aligns my work with what Margaret Kovach (Plains Cree and Saulteaux ancestry) argues for – "an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as a means of transmitting knowledge and upholds the relational which is necessary to maintain a collectivist tradition" (42). Kovach uses the term "collectivist tradition" to describe the philosophical principles of relationship and kinship in Indigenous research. It is the inherent understanding of the Indigenous collective that we are all connected and that our relationships with each other mean that we are also accountable to each other, to our communities. and to our nations. Maintaining a collectivist tradition requires a constant monitoring of one's place and privilege. I've often referred to my accountability as a Nehiyaw'iskwew, due to my relationships with my communities. In the collectivist tradition, I recognize that *my belonging* (to my extended family, to specific communities, and to the larger Nehiyawak nation), my place, and my home also give me a responsibility to them.

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[33] Oskâpew says, "More Indigenous academics are acknowledged and discussed throughout my thesis."

This research must be done with careful attention to relationship, kinship, and relational accountability. Kovach argues that an, "Indigenous methodology must meet the criteria of collective responsibility and accountability," and that, as Indigenous researchers,

> [w]e can only get so far before we see a face – our Elder cleaning fish, our sister living on the edge in East Vancouver, our brother hunting elk for the feast, our little ones in foster care – and hear a voice whispering, "Are you helping us?" (31)

Taiaiake Alfred's (Kahnawake Mohawk) compelling book *Peace, Power, Righteousness* inspired me to explore the concept of "sovereignty" in my own work. His critique of the use of the word (as it is currently applied to the relationship of Indigenous people to the nation state) required me to delve deeper into the meaning. The examination of corporeal sovereignty using *Power in My Blood* as a way to discuss land, power, and authority (as it reflects and embodies Indigenous peoples) began with Alfred and continues with Leanne Simpson and Audra Simpson (Mohawk). Both of these scholars' work provide a solid foundation in understanding how our bodies are linked to the land. Leanne Simpson's work on "Land as Pedagogy" outlines a theory deeply informed by the land and by her community. As well, she advocates for a "[c]oming to know – a mirroring or re-enactment process where we understand Nishnabeg epistemology to be concerned with embodied knowledge animated, collectively, and lived out in a way in which our reality, nationhood and existence is continually reborn through both time and space" (15). Similarly, Alfred shares and situates the condolence ceremony of his Kahnawake Mohawk people as a foundational framework in the decolonization process. The blended elements of Kahnawake traditional philosophy and teachings work together with contemporary academic theorizing to provide the necessary combination for the formation and organization of knowledge for healthy and thriving sovereign nations.

Texts such as Alfred's, as well as Paul Heilker's [34] compilation of writers in *The Essay,* embolden me to shrug off the shackles of Western conventional methods of disembodied research and writing and to situate myself within my own knowledge and contemporary reality. When Leanne Simpson and others speak about experiential epistemologies, they note that "[i]f you want to learn about something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it. Get a practice" (18). I strive to locate my legitimacy and truth and I am left to wonder,

What would a PhD thesis be like if at least half the time
were spent on the land, in community, observing,
watching, listening, experimenting, and experiencing
both singularly and also with others.

children youth adults elders women genderful men trees mountains bushes water lakes rivers streams rain snow chipmunks crabs blue jays mosquitoes stars oolichan ravens buffalo coyotes wolves bears cedars clouds sand earth

How would our own observations inform
our understandings of the world, of our topic,
of our research? Instead, we are encouraged,
coerced to journey (for the most part) alone,
surrounded by written knowledge, experiences, and
observations from other minds.

Don't get me wrong, to access knowledge
from written text is crucial, there are very

bright stars

and brilliant, critical Indigenous minds
putting their observations and insights to paper.
These are wonderful additions to our own work.

But what of our own experiences?
There should be more freedom to the ways
in which we gain knowledge for
these academic credentials.

Audra Simpson's brilliant keynote, *The Chiefs of Two Bodies: Theresa Spence and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty*, articulated how Indigenous bodies (specifically Indigenous

[34] Oskâpew says, "Heilker is a modern critic of the thesis/support form. See *The Essay."*

women's bodies) threaten the legitimacy of the settler state of Canada. Also, and importantly for my work in *Power in My Blood,* Simpson connected the dispossession of land with the killing of Indigenous women. As well, scholars like Joyce Green, who edited the book *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* in 2007, and editors Cheryl Suzack (Batchewana First Nations), Shari M. Hundorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman, who compiled a book called *Indigenous Women and Feminism* in 2010, along with Emma LaRocque's work on distorted traditionalism[35] have given me a solid foundation in the history of Indigenous women's roles, responsibilities, and connection to land that has allowed me to write about current social issues and activism.

Finally, my understanding of the Indigenous erotic in *Power in My Blood* benefits tremendously from the work of scholars like Qwo-Li Driskill, whose poetry, narratives, and frequent accompanying theoretical underpinnings profoundly influence my thinking on the decolonial potentialities of queer Indigenous theory. *Queer Indigenous Studies,* edited by Qwo-li Driskill, Chris Finley, Brian Joseph Gilley, and Scott Lauria Morgensen, adds to the growing corpus of theoretical work in this field. In fact, my discussions on the connection between land and body echo and build upon previous work done by Rifkin, Justice, Lisa Tatonetti, and Andrea Smith, who each emphasize the lived connections to land and one's nation. As well, these authors create new space in which to hold alternate conversations about gender and sexuality. With a strong critique of heteronormative patriarchy, these scholars shift the conversation and interrupt colonial oppression through a rigorous re-mapping of social, economic and political realities of queer Indigenous folk. Expressions of Indigenous erotica by Chrystos, Deborah Miranda, and Kateri Akiwenzie Damm demonstrate how the erotic can operate as a conduit to personal strength and power, a step toward the

[35] Oskâpew says, "Distorted traditionism is a term coined by Dawn Martin-Hill (Mohawk, Wolf Clan) that describes cultural traditions that have become distorted or tainted due to the influences of the colonial and the Church. Other scholars such as Marie Battiste also challenge the idea of cultural traditions as static."

realization of corporeal sovereignty. Indigenous erotica reminds readers to be present, and demands readers have an elevated consciousness of being. My readings of the erotic have awakened in me a sense of celebration in writing and expression. This suggests, perhaps, that if we can break down oppressive barriers within ourselves, then we can also use erotica to dismantle restrictive ways of thinking about gender and sexuality.

These texts on Indigenous erotica reveal how the Indigenous erotic already functions in our everyday lives, and how, if fully embraced, it becomes holistic medicine. The Indigenous erotic holds possibilities for reimagining gender and sexuality, and becomes a path of corporeal sovereignty that leads to sovereign nations. These authors and/or academics examine the limits and potentialities of sovereignty within a framework of Indigenous-centered queer theory. I have also found the work of black lesbian radical feminist Audre Lorde invaluable. Her defense and celebration of the body and sex alongside the work of Driskill, Justice, and Rifkin have been essential to my examination of Indigenous erotics as a method for a "wholeness of being" (in which all aspects of our lives are felt deeply and recognized as our cohesive whole). In particular, Lorde explores the possibilities of the erotic as a way in which humans can strive for excellence. The works of Driskill and Justice embrace the erotic as a site for Indigenous sexual healing and point out the possibilities for decolonization. Readers will note the few non-Indigenous exceptions here, including bell hooks, Audre Lorde, and some white settler scholars. Lorde's article "Uses of the Erotic: Erotic as Power" in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* remains an elemental and foundational lodgepole[36] for my work in the erotic. Her words resonate in my work with missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls when she states that as women, we have been trained to suppress the erotic knowledge within us, and in doing so, we deny ourselves power, which leaves us vulnerable to oppression, subjugation, and victimization.

[36] Oskâpew says, "Here, the word 'lodgepole' is exchanged for the word 'pillar.' A centre lodgepole is the first pole erected when building a ceremonial space."

Using Lorde's understanding of the erotic relates directly to my work in the promotion of corporeal sovereignty and the power we hold as Indigenous women. Similar to the philosophy of bell hooks's[37] seminal book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, I also demand that we think critically about the current realities of the politics of race and gender discrimination. In relation to the topic of Indigenous erotica, I agree with hooks's demand for a critical dialogue. We must open up discussions among ourselves to talk about our politicized bodies, and realize that as Indigenous women, we have specific histories that contain colonial practices. These histories shape our current realities, so, to understand our bodies and promote our bodily sovereignty, we must understand the past. Knowing the oppressions Indigenous women face, we are primed to reimagine our sexuality and open up to our erotic selves. We can then establish new spaces for the creation and dissemination of Indigenous erotica and the celebration of the erotic. These texts present a clear analysis of the biopolitics of gender and sexuality, colonialism, and heteropatriarchy, and inevitably led me to the Indigenous erotic.

While this methodology was excruciatingly difficult to capture and articulate for my thesis, I've come to the realization that these principles have been present my entire life, existing in my very being as a Nehiyaw'iskwew. As my research into Indigenous erotics progressed, specific Indigenous worldviews began to emerge, and I recognized these patterns in my own Nehiyaw'iskwew experiences. For instance, embodied experiences such as my ceremonial experiences with *Walking With Our Sisters* (WWOS) in seven different communities demonstrated that the "practice" of relationship in ceremony was an Indigenous epistemological approach. Through this praxis, I mapped a research approach that advanced my research topic and honoured my Indigenous experience and worldviews. An Indigenous research method acts as a resistance to the conventional theoretical frameworks

[37] Oskâpew says, "bell hooks is an African-American female scholar/activist whose works have been considered bold and controversial."

encountered in academia, and provides readers with an alternative to the current rules of engagement.

Emboldened by the words of Sally A. Kimpson[38] in her article "Stepping off the Road," I wanted to get to a place where I could "trust my own authority and ways of knowing as an Indigenous woman" (87). Kimpson's article speaks to the anti-oppressive research methodology approaches she uses as a disabled woman. Similar to the "textual resistance" forms of oral narrative and storytelling, Kimpson argues that autobiographical narratives create opportunity for "alternate forms of representation of the lives of marginalized people" (73). This dissertation uses textual resistance forms of autobiographical narratives and storytelling to expand readers' experience and promote deeper understanding. The inclusion of a form of textual resistance (personal story, poem, autobiographical narrative, etc.) is purposeful and meant to expand readers' understandings of the lesson at hand. To Wilson, an Indigenous methodology also parallels this truth: "[When] we talk about methodology, we are talking about how you are going to use your ways of thinking (epistemology) to gain more knowledge about your reality" (29). I write to gain knowledge about my reality – for my communities and myself. I study the Indigenous erotic and Indigenous erotica, because that is an effective way into that reality. It is also a powerful way to extend and celebrate this reality.

PART TWO
CONVENTIONAL APPROACHES

To begin, I must remind you of my situation – simultaneously a challenging position and an intriguing opportunity. I speak with the authority of my Nehiyaw'iskwew voice,

[38] Oskâpew says, "Kimpson is an academic who grounds her methodological approaches within her own perspectives as a disabled woman."

a voice that includes distinct research methods and perspectives. Yet my voice – in the form of this thesis – must also satisfy the criteria of a Western academic institution if I wish to obtain a PhD. Can I confess something to you, curious reader?

I am reluctant to dedicate a substantial space to a discussion on the "conventional" approach.

Why, you ask? I believe (as you have glimpsed in the last section) that Indigenous scholars have already been very vocal and critical about the colonial history and current politics of Western scholarly discourse. The current Indigenous perspective, emerging from the work of scholars such as Tuhiwai Smith, Kovach, Wilson, Robina Anne Thomas and others, provides a clear history and insight into the formation of Western knowledge. These Indigenous scholars encourage the creation and use of Indigenous research methods and protocols that work toward addressing our political and social issues. They enrich the conversation regarding what constitutes legitimate knowledge production and dissemination, and expand the meaning of what counts as "rigorous" research methods. I fear that any additional discussion of the topic acts only as a kind of servile justification for my finding a new path. I am encouraged to speak about them, however, by assertions such as that of Wilson, who claims that the development and use of Indigenous research methodologies have great potential for Indigenous scholars and their communities. He asserts:

> Part of the importance of developing an Indigenous research paradigm is that we can use methods and forms of expression that we judge to be valid for ourselves. We can get past having to justify ourselves to the dominant society and academia. We can develop our own criteria for judging usefulness, validity or worth of Indigenous research or writing. We can decide for ourselves what research we want and how that research will be conducted, analyzed and

> presented.… It is for you and other Indigenous people that these ideas are expressed. (14)

Power in My Blood claims substantial "thesis space" in order to express and explain the how, why, and what of my own Indigenous methodology — my Nehiyaw'iskwew research method. I hope to find a careful balance and provide a clear definition of what constitutes a "conventional method, and how it functions (and does not), and yet I also wish to avoid "justifying" my methods and slipping into a strict binary analysis.

The words "conventional approach" or "conventional" in *Power in My Blood* refer to the standard processes that accompany methodologies within the Western thesis/argument formula that academic institutions generally regard as "acceptable" research approaches. Conventional processes of research and writing dictate and reinforce the perspectives, attitudes, and language of the colonizer, thereby legitimizing what counts as knowledge. A conventional Western European method enables the colonizing forces of settler state legacies to continue to organize, name, and define Indigenous communities. Dissenting research voices are often on the margins, and labelled as invalid, unproven, unscholarly, marginalized, and, ultimately, dismissed. Conventional practices have been formalized, and subsequently "normalized" by dominant power. These accepted standards regulate the ways in which Indigenous knowledges are produced and disseminated. A crucial element of the conventional method often requires the author to project a voice of authority and power. As such, the voice must retain a dissociative stance. The disembodied voice from "nowhere" (and seemingly "everywhere") separates the producer of the text from the text itself. This extraction of self from the text seductively suggests to readers that Western discourse, specifically knowledge produced about the Other (as Edward Said had it), is the universal default. The privileged voices, then, are ones that rely upon a projected state of disembodiment to authorize a particular set of norms, values, and

cultural beliefs. A disembodied voice relies upon an axis whose default mechanism legitimizes dominant Western European systems of knowledge.

Furthermore, a disembodied/objective conventional academic approach to research is severed from the erotic. Divorced from embodied knowledges, the objective voice effectively erases the erotics of lived experiences, and rejects the importance of one's identity and location as they pertain to the intellectual domain. Conventional methods favour an assumed privileged discourse and dismiss the integration of our full selves. In her article "Bodies of Knowledge: Definitions, Delineations, and Implications of Embodied Writing in the Academy," Alison Knoblauch[39] explains that to engage a disembodied voice in academic writing is to resort to the societal default of white, male, and privileged (59). She goes on to say that "those practicing embodied rhetoric can disrupt the mastery in order to reflect the writer's positionality within the academy" (61). As such, as an Indigenous woman at the epicentre of a universalist discourse within the academy, I cannot afford to ignore the body (my body), or attempt to detach (my) mind and body; to do so erases difference, and results in indifference. As much as academic convention would have us believe otherwise, our views do not stem from "nowhere." Furthermore, as Knoblauch states, a view from NOWHERE "assumes … that each body is equally constructed, equally accepted, and equally provided for in this society" (Knoblauch 58). Believing that all bodies are equal and that all voices are heard is dangerous, as it sublimates the fact that there are historically subjugated and silenced voices. Therefore, Indigenous women's bodies, my Indigenous body, and the embodied knowledge they/I carry harbours the codes needed to survive and thrive.

Academic institutions reinscribe the status quo of the dominant culture when the expectations of thesis writing require that we disconnect ourselves from our gender, spirituality, sexuality, and our lived experiences. For example, during my undergrad, if

[39] Oskâpew says, "Alison Abby Knoblauch's research explores the pedagogy of embodied rhetoric."

I remained disembodied and objective (and avoided the use of the personal pronoun "I"), my writing garnered high praise from instructors who deemed my work to be more authoritative and, apparently, more convincing. Forays into the subjective realm brought about the subtle encouragement to be less "casual" and less "personal." While not every instructor discouraged this personal perspective, the first-person point of view seemed to be considered less professional and/or believable. What a challenging position for those whose lives are embedded in spirituality and those who practice ceremony on a daily basis! Indigenous perspectives and voices like mine have been historically marginalized, dismissed, and silenced.

A conventional research method is often an "extractive process" (Gaudry 114), and as much as producers work to extract themselves from the research, so, too, do they attempt to extract knowledge (from Indigenous communities). Gaudry explains that extractive methods are viewed as a standard approach, and that research within the academy must be rigorous by virtue of being objective, thereby dissociating it from Indigenous practices of relationality and accountability. According to Rigney, the process of extraction is "the acquisition of Indigenous knowledges and the ensuing ownership of that knowledge which are the foundations upon which many academic qualifications and careers have been achieved" (109). As a result, Indigenous people and communities have research done "to" and "on" them, and were rarely involved in or participate in research that is reciprocal or beneficial. Too often, knowledge is taken away from a community, with little or no long-term advantages to the participants. Conventional research models rarely consider the space, time, and resources needed to fulfill the responsibilities we have to the communities with which we work. As well, conventional research methods rarely include conclusions that ask, "How has this changed you?" and "How has this changed things for the better for your community?" Embodied knowledges require researchers to reflect upon and examine their

intentions and think about the motivations behind the gathering and assembling of their research.

Imagine the possibilities for growth in academic fields through the confluence of knowledges as we each articulate our deeply held beliefs and biases. We must encourage others to use their embodied voices as a way to disrupt the status quo. In my work, I aspire to make space for an Indigenous methodological practice of an eroticanalysis. I hope *Power in My Blood* acts as part of this challenge, which Gaudry delineates when he states that an Indigenous methodology "challenges what counts as legitimate knowledge and research dissemination, [and] understanding of responsibility that makes research important to real people and relevant in the lives of Indigenous peoples" (128). As well, Lightning's revolutionary work and "unconventional" research with Elder Louis Sunchild acts as a beacon to Indigenous scholars like myself, and provides examples of a practice of accountability within culturally relevant research. Walter Lightning, Patricia Monture-Angus (Mohawk), Winona Wheeler, and LaRocque's work on Indigenous methodologies reverberate within my own research on embodied knowledges, and my practice of eroticanalysis. In this way, I strive to provide new perspectives and insights into Indigenous realities, such as lived experiences, histories, cultural ways of being, values, and our own bodies.

Although the insurgence of Indigenous methodologies within the academy may seem to challenge or confront the dominant colonial script, I propose that the inclusion of Indigenous methodologies also offers transformative possibilities *for* the academy. To keep our conversations genuine, we must acknowledge and celebrate the potential of both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems to enrich the academy. Indigenous concepts of learning, instruction, and knowledge dissemination must be welcomed and given space within Western academic institutions. Embodied

knowledges allow Indigenous researchers to define themselves, recentre and redefine Indigenous perspectives within the academy, and reject any external definition or classifications. Kovach argues that the exclusion and restrictive sharing of knowledges has had serious consequences for all of us:

> Indigenous knowledges are inherently practical with the ability to respect what knowledge is needed, why and when. The intellectual, sensual, spiritual, physical, emotional ways we interact with the world will be needed at some point – this is not contested in Cree knowledge. In a hunt, for example, why would one disregard any particular knowledge source? Why would one limit oneself and jeopardize one's purpose? Integrative knowledges such as this represent a "hard core" knowledge skillset. No wonder holistic knowledges are dismissed … [since] it is difficult to re-image such a world, [one] where humans respected and practiced the totality of these capacities within themselves. (109–27)

Finally, a quick word about conclusions. Embodied knowledge develops due to deep and ongoing self-reflection. If embodied knowledges result in continuous explorations and interpretations, how do we satisfy the thesis requirement for a conclusion? Lightning shares his reasoning on this matter and relates his difficulty in conforming to the common thesis obligation to write a conclusion for his essay. Doing so, he says, infringes on his cultural protocol (73). To write a "conclusion" in his essay interferes with the teachings of Elder Louis Sunchild. Lightning writes, "I could not write a summary called a 'conclusion' without violating the principles of interpretation of text for the culture in which it was written, because the interpretations never concluded" (74). Without a predetermined "end" or conclusion, an Indigenous alternative has the ability to transgress discursive boundaries and promote multiple realities, perspectives, and viewpoints. The destination won't be clear, can never be clear.

doesn't that sound like an adventure?

2) THEORY - EROTICANALYSIS

The first level of learning about eroticanalysis begins with a definition and examples of the Indigenous erotic. As you will recall from the section Expressions in Indigenous Erotica in the literature review (and as you will hopefully come to embody fully by the end of the next chapter, dedicated entirely to the Indigenous erotic!), the Indigenous erotic is a confluence of all the embodied aspects of a holistic being, an exploration of all aspects of our humanity, with the goal of seeing our bodies as centres for our spirits, minds, sexualities, and sensualities. The second level requires you, the reader, to participate in a series of embodied practices, ranging from physical actions to deep personal reflections. These embodied devices are aimed at helping you, relentless reader, to internalize the concepts and accompanying stories, and move them *from* the page *to* your body. As mentioned previously (and as you have already experienced), requests appear throughout *Power in My Blood*. I provide these strategically placed requests to help you be mindful of the nearby passages. These spaces are *gifts* to help you be introspective about how you currently relate to the text, and how the text reflects (or does not reflect) your understandings of the world. An eroticanalysis aspires to allow readers to inhabit, habitually and naturally, a sensuous and mindful ethos that allows you to relate to both writer and written text. An eroticanalysis also requires consideration of the relationships among the texts themselves. My intentions are to have you breathe in and feel the words on the page, to build a relationship with them and among them. An eroticanalysis provides you with an alternate way of receiving and processing information. I hope the embodied devices continually remind you about privileging one kind of knowledge over another. Accordingly, you, as reader, can journey with me, as author, as we learn our own lessons and self-locate to represent our own truths and our own realities. An eroticanalysis requires you, the reader,

to consider my lived experiences as well as *your own* as places to cultivate and produce embodied knowledge.

Earlier, I touched briefly on embodied knowledges as I explained the disembodiment of voice in a conventional research approach. For myself and Knoblauch, embodied knowledge relies on our "gut instincts" (52), and these gut reactions are created and understood through what Hui Niu Wilcox[40] explains as "lived experiences, cultural performance, and bodily intelligence" (105). Empirical, quantifiable, evidence-based research displaces the integral work of embodied knowledges within the academy. As researchers within the academy, we must be keenly aware of our embodied situations. We must be reflective and self-aware, just as Knoblauch's and Sara Ahmed's work in embodied knowledge suggests. Ahmed asserts "[k]nowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world" (171).

For my research, embodied learning and eroticanalysis naturally (and necessarily) occur within an autobiographical/essay-style framework. They also function to keep me honest. Similarly, when describing the relationship between the autobiographical research process and "honesty," Kimpson notes Carol Schick's[41] influence on her work:

> Schick's (1992) words strongly influenced my decision to write autobiographically: after much deliberation, she decided to include her own responses … rather than pretend that she had remained unaffected by the research process. The woman's inclusion of her own responses could be interpreted by some as having transgressed the mythical bounds of objectivity;

[40]Oskâpew says, "Wilcox is an academic who integrates and connects dance with her critical studies of race, ethnicity and activism."
[41] Oskâpew says, "Schick (like Kimpson) is an academic who grounds her methodological approaches with her own perspectives as a disabled woman."

> but it is also an example of scrupulous honesty in the process of doing feminist research. (29)

Like Kimpson and Schick, I include my own embodied responses here. This is an integral aspect of eroticanalysis. Eroticanalysis rejects and refuses to conform to orthodox academic analytic conventions. It is a challenge to the dominant authoritative voice. Kimpson and Schick reinforce the concept that there are bold alternatives to the conventional style of research.

In my research, eroticanalysis is the careful sharing of my gut reactions, and includes embodied knowledge about the things that I understand (from my experiences) to be true. For example, embedded within *Power in My Blood* is my ceremonial and spiritual work with *Walking With Our Sisters* (WWOS)*,* a memorial art installation to honour and remember the over 1,400 missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and genderful people in Canada. The spiritual items that make up the WWOS memorial are sacred and referred to as a sacred bundle, or the "Sisters." This sacred bundle includes 1,818 moccasin vamps, eagle staffs, medicines, and other spiritual items that have been gifted to the memorial. But if you haven't been to the memorial yet, how do I help you understand the enormous effect and influence this has had on my life and my research as a Nehiyaw'iskwew academic? The inclusion of my lived experiences with WWOS demonstrates how theory can become an embodied practice. My ongoing experiences of and reflections on WWOS continue to help me grow and learn aspects of ceremony, community, and empowerment. Progression is a part of my journey *and yours,* and remains an integral part of learning and erotic self-discovery. It is grounded in, respects, and validates Indigenous worldviews. Embodied experiences work to connect concepts using intuition as much as intellect.

One of the most prominent features of this method is a careful unfolding of interrelated concepts that are meant to build into and onto each other. Each of our discussions, and

each of my stories, is delivered in an embodied voice, designed to amplify and augment your growing understanding of the erotic.

Eroticanalysis is an interwoven network of associations, and a method that creates a greater independence in the learning process. This independent thinking model breaks with conventional methods in which readers often depend heavily upon an author for enlightenment each step of the way. I hope a deeper comprehension will result if I allow you to reflect, internalize, reimagine, reorganize, and coalesce my thoughts on the erotic with your own experiences and the text. Engaging in the erotic enters a world that encourages the inclusion of holistic knowledges, embodies the sensations of our everyday lives, and embraces of all the capacities within ourselves.

Eroticanalysis does not require fluency in one's native language; Indigenous scholars can still strive to create a space that centralizes their language and language concepts, and in doing so, can "mobilize a range of Indigenous-rooted concepts that can represent key characteristics of our worldviews to an English-language audience" (Gaudry 131). The language in *Power in My Blood* and the concepts it carries shape the way we think and act. The Nehiyawewin concepts and language shared in this text uphold ideals and logic centered within the Nehiyawewin worldview. Nehiyawak Elders and language carriers often say that Cree language cannot be separated from the culture. Ours is a language that uses a lot of verbs; everything, even colours, are always in action. For example, the colour red is "being red," and purple is in the act of "being purple." Nehiyawewin is an embodied language, in which colours are given life.

Look around you; let your eyes rest on an object in the room that you might not always "see" or notice every day. If you can, hold it in your hands and experience the sensations of it. If you were thinking in Nehiyawewin, you would think of the item as "being" or "doing" something.
Is it being glassy? Squishy? <aybe
it is providing warmth and comfort?
What is your item "being"? Write down your thoughts.

There is a sensuality in Nehiyawewin; the language is alive, and the words can be either animate or inanimate. Just as the animacy in Nehiyawewin reveals a worldview, with its own ideals and logic, each word has a rich depth of meanings. For example, Wheeler explains the word "iskwêw," woman:

> Iskwêw, woman, derives from iskotêw, *fire*, and is a metaphor for life. The taxonomical genealogy of iskwêw goes back to the sacred stories of the first woman, which explain that women's bodies are links between the spirit and human worlds through which life emerges. The image iskwêw elicits is that of a brightly burning fire that nourishes and protects life on its journey to earth. (16–17)

Our Indigenous languages are powerful; as the word "iskotêw" demonstrates, every word carries with it a tremendous amount of generational knowledge. As a non-fluent speaker who is slowly learning the language, I am amazed at the great meanings that each word holds. Battiste reminds us, "People speak their language and relate their stories not just to tell of subsistence or sovereignty but also to tell of all that is meaningful for understanding ourselves, individually and collectively, as human beings" (xxvi). Many Indigenous authors and artists are already contributing to this growing field of locating knowledge by re-centering themselves within their own histories, stories, songs and ceremonies and reconnecting to their ancestral bodies. Our movement as Indigenous people to decolonize ourselves must engage with projects that have methods rooted in the cultural knowledge and practices of our peoples.

> *As the opening day for WWOS loomed, planning had reached a fever pitch. Our Edmonton team had outlined a schedule of events. The opening day called for welcoming speeches from local dignitaries who included upper-level university*

> *representatives, government officials, Treaty 6, 7, and 8 dignitaries, and leaders from the Métis Nation of Alberta. However, having "officials" preside over the day did not sit well with our team. We felt that by positioning these dignitaries as speakers on opening day, we were acknowledging the authoritative power they held. We felt that this obvious display of hierarchy would only function as another colonizing mechanism. The Edmonton team consisting of Erin Konsmo, Tara Kappo, Tanya Kappo and myself, we consulted with Maria and Christi, it was decided that we did not wish to follow the expected agenda. It was a reminder that the installation was one grounded in ceremony, and that we could not be distracted by the "expected norms and protocols," demanded by the University as our ultimate responsibility was to our communities.*

As Rigney states, "From an Indigenous perspective, my people's interests, experiences, and knowledges must be at the centre of research methodologies and the construction of knowledge about us" (13). The project of WWOS embodies the principles of Indigenous methodologies; they are action-oriented, relevant to current social issues, and are geared toward use by Indigenous communities. It provides the impetus and motivation for practical and direct action and embodies the principles of "All My Relations."

In my attempt to justify my reasons for writing in a style that has distinctly Indigenous elements, I found myself wondering about the need to justify at all. Do we not recognize that the truth is larger than one language, or one culture? Where shall we begin to look for truth? I am not foolhardy enough to suggest a pure, unadulterated version of a Nehiyaw'iskwew truth. I cannot be a part of any essentialist claims. The only one truth is the many truths making up one part of the whole. Without my truth, without your truths, without others' truths … there can be no truth.

Patricia Monture-Okanee (Mohawk) explained this challenging position for Aboriginal academics and argued:

> [They] are more frequently being asked to explain our unique cultural ways of being. Yet it is expected that the objective style of academic writing ought not to be changed to accommodate the request to explain or the new understandings that Aboriginal academics bring to various disciplines. (107)

These Indigenous frameworks bring forth new knowledges and understandings of Indigenous worldviews. I remain indebted to these scholars and many others like them, for they teach me that it is critical for Indigenous researchers to use our voices, and that we create research methodologies that correspond to the research we hope to share.

3) EPISTEMOLOGY – TRLC

My epistemological practices, my beliefs about how one might discover knowledge about the world inform and shape my methodological approach. As mentioned, these four key epistemological practices are locality, textual resistance, ceremony, and relational accountability. These practices re-centre Indigenous knowledges and my own Nehiyaw'iskwew ways of knowing within the academy. These elements of Indigenous research methodological practices in *Power in My Blood* do not stand alone, nor are they positioned as a static group. They function as my holistic epistemological practice, informing each other, intimately interrelated and interdependent.

Locality

First and foremost, an Indigenous research practice includes a constant locating of oneself. Location in this sense is not merely a geographical location, like a point on a map. Locating myself is a constant revision, involving the constant questions, "Who is speaking?" and "Where am I speaking from?" I understand "locality" as the position of the author, and

"locating" as the act of the author constantly positioning herself. This Indigenous methodology embodies the element of locality by working to foster a constant locating and relocating of the author. *Locality* locates and situates the position of the author and is one of the methods by which I guide the reader. For example, the story called "Tante Ohci Kiya?" situates me and becomes a teaching tool; my personal narrative allows readers to experience a personal journey through my eyes. As readers gain insight into my life, they can understand how the abstract concepts in this thesis have a real impact in the world.

My personal narrative is also a form of "textual resistance" in that it works to maintain an oral storytelling feel within a written text. The personal narrative forms of "textual resistance" strengthen the "locality" of the author's standpoint. The inclusion of a personal story functions in two ways: it works to maintain an oral storytelling feel within a written text (textual resistance), and it provides insight into the author's character (locality). In these ways, the subjective academic author creates interconnections between the reader and author. Later on in this text, I share a personal story about my involvement in a play called *Pig Girl*. The inclusion of this story (*textual resistance*) demonstrates my stance (*locality*) on the topic of responsibility (*relational accountability*). My experience with *Pig Girl* is an informal, intimate, and personal conversation that forges a relationship between you, my loyal reader, and myself. Personal narratives functioning as intermediaries for a relationship are critical aspects of embracing the erotic.

So, reader, where are you from? Can you write down a quick paragraph on what you would say IF someone asked you where you were from? Please save some room for another paragraph (you'll see) and put the paper aside for later.

Embodied Knowledge #1 – "Tante Ohci Kiya?"

"Tante ohci kiya?" the old man speaks Cree to me. "Edmonton," I reply happily, thinking I know what these words mean. "Moya," he shakes his head and says with a frown. Pointing to my belly, he asks again, "Tante ohci kiya?" In the split second before I speak, I go through my repertoire of answers; should I explain that I never lived on my reserve in Montreal Lake? Hmm, no, I don't want to tell him that – too much information. Do I tell him my white stepfather was a mining superintendent and we lived all over Canada? Ah, no! Again, too much information! I could tell him I grew up going to schools where I was the only brown face around. No way! That explanation is out; the last thing I want is a pity party. So I decide to explain where my reserve is located, "I'm from Montreal Lake First Nation, which is about an hour north of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan." Again I hear the word meaning no; "Moya," he said to me, and walked away. I am left feeling a deep sadness, which I came to understand later as my sense of loss (of language) and rejection (of my people).

The exchange left me perplexed for years, until just a short while ago, when an Elder imparted this knowledge: When another Nehiyawe asks you the question "Tante ohci kiya?" they aren't asking you where you were born, nor are they inquiring where you grew up. "What are they asking, then?" I asked – and you might be wondering. Perhaps it is best to explore the Cree words tante ohci kiya *a little more closely. "Tante" is the Nehiyawe word for "where"; "kiya" means "you"; and "ohci" means "from." On a basic language level – and as I learned in my Cree class – it could simply mean, "Where are you from?" However, put together with a little cultural fluency, the sentence has a deeper meaning that translates to "**Who** are you from?" So "tante ohci kiya," in a cultural context, means that my bellybutton is literally the connection*

between me and my mother, the connection to all my ancestors, to my grandmother and my great-greats.

These invisible umbilical cords connect me with my children, and their children to come, as much as to the past sea of generations. These are "All My Relations." The old man never asked for my geographical movements, or the "where"; he wanted to know the "who" I was connected to, who my relations were. He wanted me to share "who" I came from, and the "who" of my family. Wâ, tân'si, Tracy Lee Bear nitsikason ekwa Cohkanâpisîs Onîmihito, nikâwiy Carol Bear, kokum ekwa moosum Lillian and Edgar Bear. Hello, how are you? My name is Tracy Lee Bear, and the name that my ancestors know me by Dragonfly Dancer. My mother is Carol Bear, my grandmother and my grandfather, Lillian and Edgar Bear.

In this story, I "locate" and centre myself in a Nehiyawak conversation on language and identity. The story demonstrates two key elements: subjectivity and self-discovery. This first-person narrative emphasizes the subjectivity of the interaction and acknowledges my presence. It is critically important for Indigenous researchers to locate themselves in this way, as Verna St. Denis (Cree/Métis) reminds us in her article "Feminism is for Everybody: Aboriginal Women, Feminism and Diversity." She encourages all Indigenous scholars to recognize the source of our knowledge and reflect on how we situate ourselves within a Western paradigm. She stresses the importance of locating ourselves with an Indigenous voice and uses the words of Franz Fanon: "At the very moment when the Native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work, he fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country" (223). St. Denis, a veteran educator in anti-racism, likewise underpins the critical importance of Indigenous writers to locate themselves. My inclusion of the story "Tante Ohci Kiya?" deliberately inserts my voice and experience into the narrative, resisting the danger that Fanon warns against. My Nehiyaw'iskwew resistance, then, embodies the erotic by using Nehiyawewin

and techniques of embodied voice within the text. Similarly, Kimpson employs bell hooks to discuss her endeavours to encourage us to use our own voices and our own experiences as a way to subvert current political realities. Kimpson states, "As a feminist, using my own experience as the ground for my research practice is a deeply subversive and political move that is enacted by naming," and she uses bell hooks to argue for "'that location from which I come to voice – that [embodied] space of my own theorizing'" (hooks 1990, 146). This space I offer to share with you, this "embodied space of my own theorizing," springs from my Nehiyaw'iskwew motives, values, and beliefs in the terrain of Indigenous research methods. I opt for an Indigenous-centred conversation, with methods grounded in the questioning and reflection of my location, and guided by "All My Relations."

So, reader, can you tell me now, "Tante Ohci Kiya?"
Retrieve the previous piece of paper and write down your answer now. Compare the two responses. How are they different?
Which rings more "true" to you? Reflect on what your response to "Tante Ohci Kiya?" would be (and is)
in different areas of your life (work, social, other).

I share stories and hope that you, loyal reader, understand my position. This cognizance builds a relationship between you and me; it bridges the distance between us. As you gain insight into and knowledge about me, a relationship develops between us. This unusual intimacy resists the authoritative voice often heard in the social sciences. As much as locality identifies and reifies the consciousness of the author, it also reminds you of my actual place and position. These personal narratives of my lived experiences reveal an Indigenous body within the academy. A voice is raised up and recognized for what it is — an Indigenous voice; others have spoken for us and about us for too long. Indigenous scholars establish the right to the production and dissemination of Indigenous knowledge. Locality is also about self-discovery. For

example, the **locality** of the author is a critical piece of the equation in understanding the author's subjective point of view. Locality interrupts the concept of objectivity in traditional academic discourse and disrupts colonial knowledge production. As Indigenous writers, we must claim and stake out our location. This demonstrates to the world that that *we* are the authority on how to locate ourselves in a space. As well, as rhetorical scholar, Thomas J. Farrell notes, locating myself in this text "obfuscates the boundaries between writer and subject and writer and audience and to emphasize 'indirection,' implicitness and openness" (910).

Textual Resistance

Textual resistance is a set of strategies that recreates a sense of oral storytelling traditions in written form. This may include elements like rhythmic variation, patterns, repetition, and sounds; for example, I use a conversational style in my personal narratives to recreate an oral voice. These are strategies that resist western European textual strategies and strive to embody storytelling traditions within a written framework. LaRocque first coined the term "textual resistance" to describe the strategies of Indigenous writers working within Indigenous "ethos and epistemologies" (2). Van Camp also uses the term "Raven's Talk" as independent scholar Mareike Neuhaus relates, to describe a "culturally specific reading strategy for textualized orality in Indigenous literatures" (6). Textual resistance engages with the narratives of our felt Indigenous experiences; it is an "experience" of the world rather than an imposition of "truth."

As *Power in My Blood* is obviously not oral, there is no opportunity for me to gauge the proclivity of the reader. Despite the obvious hurdle of creating written documents from the Indigenous oral tradition, LaRocque stresses that we as Indigenous scholars must maintain orality in writing, a "textual resistance technique" (13), and states that:

> Native voice can be, must be, used within academic studies not only as an expression of cultural integrity but also as an attempt to begin to balance the legacy of dehumanization and bias entrenched in Canadian studies about Native peoples. (13)

There is a distinct relationship between reader and author that develops and, as with any relationship, there is a reciprocal responsibility for each participant. For example, the author must give the reader an explanation of any new concepts, and the reader is responsible for remembering the concept for future application. Textual resistance challenges readers to "discover" and tease out the meanings by themselves. It can be a frustrating experience, especially when there is an absence of a neatly presented conclusion. Lightning substantiates the reiterative and reflective nature that embodies Indigenous storytelling principles, and his conversations with his Elder, Louis Sunchild, demonstrate the non-linear thinking and circulatory nature of Nehiyawe teachings. Terry Tafoya, in the following oft-quoted paragraph, explains the non-linear aspect of stories:

> Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. It helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside and between stories, and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. Part of finding is getting lost, and when you are lost you start to open up and listen. (7)

Are you ready to go in circles, reader?
You will find that there are stories inside, between, above and beyond my stories.
Do not fear the unknown; embrace the lost feeling.
I promise to bring you home.

Accepting that Indigenous knowledge and culture is dynamic, adaptable, and fluid, readers should remember the entreaty to "find knowledge by getting lost" and embody

an openness of the mind. This work and the thoughts flowing from it illustrate an Indigenous set of principles that often does not include "straight lines." Taiaiake Alfred reiterates the necessity of attending to Indigenous forms of knowing and learning:

> In fact, its form is central to the goal of conveying the logic of our traditions. I am convinced that it is futile to attempt to take abstract knowledge from the traditional teachings without making reference to their narrative form. The message must be heard in its entirety if we are to grasp its coherence and power. (15)

Indigenous storytelling methodologies are hardly straightforward due to the complexities and multiple meanings harboured within each story. Kehteyak are the ones who intimately understand the embedded meanings within stories and teachings. They often only share as much, or as little, of the story as they deem the person ready or able to understand. With gentle guidance, the listeners/readers eventually come to their own conclusions. Carefully observing the listener, the Kehteyak determines the degree of unfolding of knowledge and the depth of the lessons needing to be learned. Julie Cruikshank, known predominately for her work with Yukon storytellers in recording their life stories, stresses the value of storytelling and communal narratives. She relates this about storytelling:

> Our collaboration has been and continues to be a source of enormous enjoyment for all of us. Storytelling does not occur in a vacuum. Storytellers need an audience, a response, in order to make the telling a worthwhile experience. They have patiently trained me to understand the conventional Indigenous literary formulae so that I can hear stories told mostly in English sprinkled with place names, kinship terms, clan names, and personal names in Tagish, Tlingit, and Southern Tutchone. Telling stories in their own languages to someone who cannot understand the subtleties is like talking to a blank wall. Furthermore,

> they are excellent teachers, and when they tell me a story, they do so to explain something else to me. The whole rationale for telling them disappears if I cannot understand what they are trying to teach. (Cruikshank 16–17)

Thomas King, celebrated storyteller and author, tells us in the *Truth About Stories* that there are stories that sometimes take days to tell and some stories that take years. One of the possible reasons for the difference of length of these stories could be the degree of readiness and ability of listeners to understand and accept the knowledge. Battiste claims that Indigenous knowledges are founded in oral tradition, and to this end, "Indigenous knowledge, including its oral modes of transmission, is a vital, integral, and significant process for Indigenous educators and scholars" (xxvi). Battiste is renowned for her work in decolonizing methodologies in Indigenous education. She argues for a revitalized knowledge system to include Indigenous epistemologies into the larger framework of education. In the oral transmission framework of storytelling, a structural system of pedagogical scaffolding[42] occurs.

Face-to-face interaction with another involves so much more than just speaking, and some argue that true communication involves our bodies as much as, if not more than, our verbal cues. Kehteyak are not only responsible for the proper timing and telling of the story or teaching, but they are responsible for the person listening. Kehteyak observe carefully verbal and non-verbal cues of comprehension from the listener. If the listener shows signs of understanding, Kehteyak may deem the listener perceptive and ready to move on to the next level. The sharing is reciprocal, and prompted by the verbal and non-verbal cues of both listener and teller. Walter Lightning relates his experience:

> Elders are truly amazing in their ability to look at an individual and determine how much that person can retain, the level at which it must be expressed, and

[42] Oskâpew says, "Pedagogical scaffolding is the unfolding of lessons as the learner's knowledge grows. For example, learning karate begins with learning how to fall correctly; once the learner has perfected this, the teacher is ready to move to the next lesson."

> the content that is appropriate for that person. Many times I've seen that glimmer in their eye, the compassionate smile or laugh that told me that they knew exactly where I was, and how I thought as an individual. They knew how far I have developed and how far – a long way – I need to go to grow and learn. Although they did tell me certain things that I could not comprehend at the time, they knew that I would eventually arrive at a point of comprehension. (86)

While the element of textual resistance does not imagine itself as a replacement for a face-to-face interaction with Kehteyak, for this written text, the gradual introduction to additional material reinforces previously learned concepts. For example, the practice of textual resistance could involve using a personal narrative in the introduction to a piece about a Missing and Murdered Indigenous woman. The telling of this story thus becomes the first step toward discussing the work of Indigenous people to redefine our sexuality. Gaining knowledge in this way has a flowing quality that is progressive. Listeners and/or readers must understand, too, that the manner and message of the story or teaching may even change with each telling. Textual resistance relies upon lessons scaffolding upon each other, each layer creating a foundation for the next. The layers of meaning are interconnected, each leading into another. Alfred shares this: "The meanings of our traditional teaching are embedded in the structure of the narrative as much as in any words one might write to explain them" (15). Oral tradition continues to be adaptable and allows for changes to occur when progression is warranted. This understanding influences my research approach, and helps show why I include personal narratives and experiences in my work. Textual resistance is employed in this action; readers are able to listen to Shawn Wilson as he speaks to his sons through these letters. We don't simply gain information, we also begin to understand *how to relate to the information*. Wilson's strategy is an excellent way to define something at the same time as putting it into context. This indirect learning relates to the principles of storytelling as previously explored in this chapter and demonstrates yet

another way to interpret meanings within the text. Carl Urion (Dearborn River Métis Ancestry and, additionally, Walter Lightning's MA supervisor) relates:

> There is a "surface" story: the text and the things one has to know about the performance of it for others … the hearer isn't meant to understand the story at all levels, immediately. It is as if it unfolds. (91)

The inclusion of my thoughts and experiences with WWOS is an attempt to express this "unfolding" of understanding and invoke, as Wilson and Urion have shown, a spirit of "experience" and "discovery." Waziyatatwin Angela Wilson (Dakota from Pezihutazizi Otunwe) is a scholar whose decolonizing practices within her work includes privileging of Indigenous oral traditions. More specifically, she works with Dakota speakers to develop an Indigenous historical contextualization and accompanying analysis of Dakota history. She writes:

> Decolonization concerns a simultaneous critical interrogation of the colonizing forces that have damaged our lives in profound ways, coupled with a return to those ways that nourished and sustained us as Indigenous Peoples for thousands of years. (1)

Relational Accountability

Relational accountability is the element of an Indigenous epistemology that requires me to be accountable to my communities regarding research methods (community engagement, ethical research methodologies, knowledge ownership and dissemination, etc.). Relational accountability requires that I ask myself, and my communities, about the relevance and value of my work. Is it meaningful to the Indigenous community? For example, I am accountable to the community of WWOS, and the National Collective, particularly the families who struggle with the colonial legacies of gendered and sexual violence. I presented tobacco to my WWOS sisters and asked them to read the draft of my thesis. I asked them

to send me suggestions and advice on the accuracy and truth of the texts. Demonstrating a reciprocal accountability, one of my sisters presented me with the medicines of cedar, sweetgrass, sage, and tobacco for honouring her with the responsibility of reading my thesis. However, Western academic conventions dictate that I should explain how this research is original and how it will, ultimately, contribute to academia and the field; a difficult challenge to be sure, as this entire paper is guided by many Indigenous epistemological and methodological approaches and practices that rarely focus on justification and/or validation. The task seems more natural, however, if I return to one of the critical elements in Indigenous theory and exchange the word "justification" for "accountability." Framed within this Indigenous concept, I can explain how I am accountable and to whom, and I can demonstrate how consequences of my accountability extend throughout this thesis. Like ripples on a pond, first and foremost, the inner circle encompasses Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit and genderful people; secondly, the academic field of Indigenous Gender and Sexuality; and thirdly, academia itself. In what ways am I accountable to the first circle? My own ancestry, kinship, and gender inextricably bind me to Indigenous women, girls, and Two Spirit and genderful folk; as well, my experiences, memories, and friendships all influence me to research this area. I belong to them. I belong to this community. For the many Indigenous communities hoping to achieve sovereignty as nations, I add my research to achieve this goal. I believe in one simple truth: without corporeal sovereignty, we will have no sovereign nations. My research presents alternative understandings of our Indigenous sexuality, including the diversity within the gender spectra, and suggests sexual ways of being far more diverse than the current conventional heteropatriarchal model.

Authors, as mentioned before, must continually "locate" themselves to provide context for the reader; otherwise, the seemingly "abstract knowledge" in their various forms remain meaningless. The reader's accountability begins with a recognition of the relevance and validity of Indigenous perspectives, and a deep contemplation of the

meanings of the texts and why they were chosen; readers must read deeply or "experience" the flow of ideas, and, ultimately, come to their own conclusions. Relational accountability is a fundamental practice within this Indigenous research paradigm. Indigenous researchers ask themselves questions like, How am I accountable? To whom or which community? I am responsible for asking the hard questions, of our government and of our people. Relational accountability is a reciprocal obligation among members of a community. A good example of this is seen in Kehteyak, who often exemplify relational accountability. Their actions demonstrate that the knowledge they keep comes from, and is attributed to, the generations of knowledge holders before them. They do not speak about how much they know or compare their level of knowledge to that of anyone else. They demonstrate a level of modesty and humbleness not usually encountered in academia.

These principles of humility deviate from Eurocentric Western forms of situating and centring oneself as the authority. Kehteyak place themselves in a space of vulnerability. Many begin their prayers and ceremonies claiming to know nothing. These spiritual guides and Kehteyak have amassed an incredible wealth of cultural experience and traditional knowledge, and have worked in their communities for many decades.

and yet, and yet

despite the deep respect and reverence given to them, Kehteyak always claim to understand little, and that they have only begun to learn. As they pray, they ask the Creator to take pity on them. Grounding oneself in this way – in humility – challenges the power construct of the current academic research model. Humility and vulnerability are also expected from the listener/reader; in this way we are accountable for our actions. The authoritative voice is disembodied and originates

from an imbalance. One sits in a place of authority and the other sits somewhere below. This is the disconnection that leads to a gap in responsibility and accountability. This distance also disconnects us from others, our families, our communities, the land, ourselves, our bodies and, ultimately, from the erotic. This practice involves being responsible for the outcome of this research; my vulnerability is apparent, as is the pretense of authority. This puts everyone "in the frame of mind where the minds can meet" (Lightning 62).

Jeff Corntassel (member of the Cherokee Nation) works and practices with similar codes of respect, reciprocity and responsibility. Corntassel seeks to open up new avenues for the revitalization of Indigenous communities and to make space for "insurgent education." Corntassel shares a story from Lyackson scholar Qwul'sih'yah'maht (Robina Anne Thomas) in "Truth Telling to Community Mobilization" with Nuu-chah-nulth communities. As the researcher, she involved herself in the community, and formed relationships that grew into solid partnerships. Qwul'sih'yah'maht embodied Adam Gaudry's definition of an "[i]nsurgent researcher," people who "can act simultaneously as researchers, propagandists, community organizer, socially conscious vandals, and political leaders" (127). The key element of reciprocity becomes clear as Qwul'sih'yah'maht gives a shawl to each of the fifteen Nuu-chah-nulth communities as a gift for their hosting of an Ayts Tuu thlaa ceremony. In doing so, Qwul'sih'yah'maht demonstrated a "reciprocal accountability," which is "empowering an entire community to create an environment for well being. [It is] a reciprocal commitment between men and women" (Corntassel 19–20).

Let us return to Shawn Wilson for a moment. He approaches the text and addresses his sons in the future tense, as though they were grown. In this framework, Wilson illustrates two of my methodological practices. The first is relational accountability – he wants his sons to understand the accountability he feels as an Indigenous researcher and wants his readers

to understand the responsibility he feels for his family, for his community. Wilson defines how a lack of accountability to can harm and even traumatize an entire community. He states that

> in Cree the words that form the basis of that concept are "otcinawin" (*breaking of natural law*), which means that if a person deliberately mistreats other creatures, that action will invoke a natural justice. So they will receive a similar treatment either to themselves or their descendants … even to seven generations. And the other word is "pastahowin" which means the breaking of sacred law. (107)

The concept of otcinawin describes a type of natural justice that happens to people who abuse or mishandle others. This belief holds Indigenous and non-Indigenous people accountable for their actions in very real ways. This Indigenous filmmaker Victor Masayesva, Jr. (Hopi) prioritizes accountability within his own artistic endeavors and states:

> A Native filmmaker has … the accountability built into him. The white man doesn't have that. That's the single big distinction. Accountability as an individual, as a clan, as a tribal, as a family member. That's where we're at as Indian filmmakers. We want to start participating [in] and developing an Indian aesthetic. And there is such a thing as an Indian aesthetic, and it begins in the sacred. (1)

In the absence of relational accountability, responsibility, and what Kovach calls "collective traditions," there is a serious risk of grave mistreatment and abuse. As the following example demonstrates, the traditional Nehiyawe concept of otcinawin is not a discarded remnant of a mythical past, but rather remains a strong element within our contemporary Indigenous domain.

Embodied Knowledge #2 **– Pig Girl**

The play Pig Girl*, as the current playwright- in-residence at the University of Alberta, Colleen Murphy, tells it, was inspired by personal outrage. An outrage born of*

the failure of a criminal justice system to protect the numerous women (90 percent of whom were Aboriginal) brutally murdered by Robert Pickton, of police negligence, and of the failure of the system to apprehend him sooner. According to her interviews, Murphy's disbelief continued to grow as 20 first-degree murder charges against Pickton were subsequently stayed by Crown Counsel and diminished to six charges of second-degree murder.

I received an email from Theatre Network shortly before their new play was slated to begin its two-week run in Edmonton. Due to my involvement with Walking With Our Sisters, they invited me to speak in a talk-back session after the play (one week into its scheduled run) to "discuss one initiative [WWOS] that brought hope and respect to the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women" (personal phone conversation). After discussing this with the WWOS National Collective, and on their advice, I requested access to the screenplay. Designed to disturb and unsettle viewers, the screenplay did not disappoint in that regard. The play was offensive, and I felt that Colleen Murphy, as a non-Indigenous person, used her privileged colonial position to tell a story that was not hers to tell. Murphy, an outraged citizen seeing a need for justice, I felt, had positioned herself as the "white saviour" of all the victimized Aboriginal women.

In a review, Trevor Greyeyes (member of the Peguis First Nation) describes one of the sickening scenes: "In real time, we watch her captor rape her, abuse her, taunt her, and, eventually, hang her by a meat hook, then strangle her with his legs. She screams in pain. She screams for help. She screams for her mother, her sister, her dog. It is theatre so visceral, so upsetting, so difficult to watch, people kept getting up to leave as the show progressed" ("Pig Girl").

The play itself, the title, and the poster (fig 1.1), were incredibly violent and offensive. I imagined friends and families of the Missing and Murdered being re-traumatized by the entire event.

(Figure 1.2)

(Figure 1.3)

Consequently, I declined the invitation to participate in the talk-back panel. The play's ensemble, including the cast, the director, and playwright, did not include one Indigenous person; the talk-back panel could not find an Indigenous representative either. VUE Weekly *reviewed the play, and to accompany the review, the paper chose a haunting photo.*

The photo of the play (fig 1.2) depicted a man (looking very much like Pickton) with his hands on a woman (looking very much like an Aboriginal woman). Ironically, the personal outrage felt by Colleen Murphy (which compelled her to write the play) did not compare to the horror and criticism directed back at her, by the families and friends of the Missing and Murdered who had heard about or saw the play.

Prior to the play's opening night, a group comprised of ten Aboriginal people (including family members of two women whose DNA and body parts were found on the pig farm) – Elders, artists, theatre people, and social activists – all gathered to meet with the playwright, actors, and director to discuss our perspectives on the play. We sat in a talking circle, and with sweetgrass burning we each got a turn to explain why the play's name and visuals were profoundly offensive and disrespectful to Aboriginal people. The director was the play's only representative; nobody else connected with the play accepted our invitation to talk. The director explained that the purpose of the name and the visuals was to provoke conversation and bring light to the injustice of it. This provocation, in turn, he said, would open up a forum to inform the public of these atrocities and bring awareness to these larger social issues. In tears, quiet voices shaking with emotion, many members of the Aboriginal group tried to communicate the vulgarity and foulness that the poster and play represented to the families of these women and the re-traumatization felt by the victim's families. The meeting ended abruptly, with the director walking out and refusing to discuss any of

> *the possibilities that the group brought forth. As the director stormed out, we were left wondering if he even heard what we had come to relate.*

Reflecting back on my experience and reading both the director's and the playwright's responses to the Indigenous critique, it was clear that they relied heavily on their privileged position as people in dominant Eurocentric positions to justify their actions. Montreal historian Lise Noël speaks to the power imbalance between oppressors and oppressed and to the unquestioned authority of the dominator; her book "Intolerance: A General Survey" relates to my work in its analysis of oppression through race, gender, and sexuality. Specifically, Canada's history with Indigenous people has always included a power imbalance; as such, the Canadian state has always oppressed Indigenous people – through the Indian Act, residential schools, and other state sanctioned policies. Indigenous women, in particular, have borne and continue to bear the brunt of these assimilative and genocidal strategies. Noël states:

> Alienation is to the oppressed what self-righteousness is to the oppressor. Each really believes that their unequal relationship is part of the natural order of things or desires by some higher power. The dominator does not feel that he is exercising unjust power and the dominated do not feel the need to withdraw from his tutelage. The dominator will even believe, in all good faith, that he is looking out for the good of the dominated, while the latter will insist that they want an authority more enlightened than their own to determine their fate. (79)

In this case, the Indigenous community refused to accept the will and authority of the oppressor, and subsequently confronted them with questions concerning cultural appropriation and authenticity of voice. The interactions left both director and playwright seemingly bewildered and feeling "attacked." "Never again, he [the Director] said, would he feel comfortable staging plays about aboriginal issues. He was mourning, he said, for the lost friendships – and for the attack on his artistic independence" (Greyeyes). Non-

Indigenous creations like the play *Pig Girl* allow the narration of our social realities without any cultural context, thereby continuing to legitimize the dominant colonial discourse and colonial violence against women, particularly Indigenous women.

WWOS expresses intuitively the kind of relational accountability that Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Shawn Wilson, and Lester Rigney discuss in their texts about Indigenous research methodology. Clearly, neither the playwright nor the director of *Pig Girl* felt this sense of accountability or responsibility to the Indigenous community. Even when confronted with an opposing viewpoint (rooted in the Indigenous notion of reciprocal accountability), ultimately, their conviction and confidence (firmly based in the authority of the colonial power) rejected any such obligations, and functioned to justify their underlying paternalistic assumptions.

The talking feather has been passed to you. What would you say if you were invited to sit in this circle?
Please reflect deeply on the previous passage regarding *Pig Girl*.
When you are ready, speak out loud as you would in a talking circle.

In this particular case, the playwright and director hide behind the familiar cries of "freedom of speech" and "artistic freedom." In her interviews, Murphy expresses her motive as great benevolence, and becomes the voice for those who (apparently) cannot speak. These are the ongoing machinations of colonialism, a paternalistic perspective also performed in the Indian Act. The Indians (in this case, Indian women) are helpless victims, who would likely disappear without the help of the dominant power. This paradigm relegates Indigenous peoples either to the past, as noble-yet-doomed relics of an earlier age, or to being passive and tragic victims of contemporary realities. This "tragic victim" paradigm allows the colonial state to continue to support the cultural appropriation and sustain the ongoing censorship of Aboriginal voices. Plays like *Pig Girl* and other non-Indigenous generated projects promote themselves

as "making a difference" and "raising awareness" about the ongoing murder of Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. Through these venues, the public thinks that action takes place, and believes a solution will be found. In fact, these reassurances of "making a difference" and "raising awareness" are only subterfuge, keeping real action from taking place. Only grassroots Indigenous-led strategies, grounded in Indigenous principles, will truly make a difference in the lives of Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk.

Conversely, the National Collective of WWOS has no such power dynamics. With over 1,400 artists contributing to the installation, the exhibit continues to be as much about honouring our missing and murdered sisters as it is about empowerment and justice. Great measures are taken to care for the participants, volunteers, and guests. Through a variety of means (including a minimum of three community meetings in each town/city on the tour prior to the installation's arrival) we remain in constant contact with family members and friends of those missing and murdered. Although we meant for the moccasin vamps display to honour the lives of the missing and murdered, we knew that the memorial installation would still evoke painful memories and possibly trigger powerful emotions connected to this horrendous reality.

Otcinawin directly relates to the concept of relational accountability. The WWOS Collective is keenly aware of its own accountability to the community. In this case, "community" includes all those who are affected by the loss of missing and murdered Indigenous women. Bringing the art installation to Edmonton and displaying it for eleven days laid heavy responsibility upon WWOS – responsibility to our guests, our volunteers, and most importantly, to the community.

Ceremony

Power in My Blood relates to ceremony as epistemology as well as axiology. One of the practices of ceremony refers to the responsibilities I have as a Nehiyaw'iskwew. I must remain mindful as I research and write – remembering that I hold a responsibility to my family and community in terms of *how* I conduct my research. Ceremony is the practice of connecting ourselves to the cosmos, and to each other. As a researcher, often working in isolation, smudging[43] helps me maintain a connectedness to the land, and to the spiritual plane. Ceremony means that you practice humility, memorialization, and protocol as you write and research. The practice of ceremony involves me listening to and remembering my family's and my community's stories to guide me in my research. I must be respectful in the stories I choose to share in my research. Ceremony, as a practice, is a reminder that I am connected to everything, that I have a relationship to the land and to my kin. To honour and respect my relationships, I involve my family and my sisters in WWOS in my research. I actively speak about my writing, and we discuss the material I am presenting in my thesis. The element of protocols, are the guidelines to follow as you conduct ceremony. Ceremonial protocols, in this instance, are used in two manners; the first and most important is the unseen background work, which includes prayer and smudging, that I do as I work through my research and writing. This Nehiyaw'iskwew research method is deeply founded in the discourse of ceremony. Ceremony itself includes reciprocal accountability, memorialization, protocol, stories, relationships, kinship circles, and responsibility. Peter Hanohano (Native Hawaiian) is a colleague of Wilson's, and one of the many Indigenous scholars with whom Wilson worked while writing his book *Research is Ceremony*. The book relates Hanohano's philosophy on ceremony: "For us, the ceremony is about a story, and for all of those, you

[43] Oskâpew says, "I have been told that smudging is the cleansing of the spirit through the burning of sage, sweetgrass, or other Nehiyawe maskihkiy (medicines). The smoke from the maskihkiy is used to wash the body and mind of the past, to cleanse your spirit for the day to come."

have to let it flow, because it's built on relationships. And when you use a story, your own or others', it's claiming a voice and establishing a relationship" (125).

> *Paskwâwihkwaskwa* (*sage*) *burns in the abalone shell on my desk as I write. The smoke drifts by my lamp like undulating clouds in a windswept sky. Is it possible, dear reader, that you too, can smell this fragrance, if only in your imagination? I like to think that you can. And if so, does the notion of the scent bring to you any memories of ceremony? I've been told that our sense of smell invokes the strongest of memories. When one identifies a fragrance, two things happen simultaneously in the brain: it connects the time(s) that you smelled it in the past, and links any visual information that happened at that time as well. Research also demonstrates that being "in the presence of an odor actually increases the vividness and intensity of that remembered information when you smell that odor again."*[44] *The sense of smell serves as a powerful mnemonic device for recollection of events and memorialization of ideas, thoughts, and emotions. Of all the Nehiyawe maskihkiy,*[45] *I love paskwâwihkwaskwa the best because it is a potent woman's medicine, it guides me, centres me, and brings me to the quiet, reflective space of ceremony. I hope that the scent of paskwâwihkwaskwa will help guide my thoughts and words to paper as I explain my own burgeoning research methodologies and, within this process, reveal a tangible Indigenous research paradigm in action.*

[44] Oskâpew says, "I frankly don't remember when I first heard this fact, but the truth in it always resonated with me. For the purposes of sourcing, I accessed the website www.psychology.about.com on November 17, 2013."
[45] Oskâpew says, "This means Cree medicines."

Do you smudge, dear reader? In case you do not, I will give you some instructions. If you do, please read these instructions and proceed in your own way. First, find a quiet space (without smoke alarms preferably). Take out the paskwâwihkwaskwa, the abalone shell, and wooden matches. Take off all of your metal jewellery, and glasses. Sit down and light a bit of paskwâwihkwaskwa in your shell and let the smoke rise. Breathe in deeply and let your shoulders rest. Let your arms and eyes get heavy. Smudging is a cleansing of the spirit, much like you cleanse your body in a shower. I wash myself with the smoke and pray to go forward in a good way with my day. I also send out prayers to those less fortunate than myself. There is no "right" way or "wrong" way to smudge – this is a time of ceremony and a time when you cleanse and pray in your own way.

Qwul'sih'yah'maht's narrative shares a similar thread with my WWOS experience and returns to Wilson's foundational statement: "The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves" (11). Ceremony connects people to each other, connects us to those who have passed and accesses a greater power to help us communicate with each other on the same plane. The intersections of prayer and humility offer a spiritual cleansing and a connection to the spirit world. Virtually, we are tapping into a realm of higher consciousness, of "knowing" that would otherwise remain darkness to us. As Wilson says, "Remember, research by and for Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that brings relationships together" (8) and ceremony is a "[r]aised level of consciousness and insight into our world" (11). Similarly, the purpose of any academic research, at its very centre, is also to advance our consciousness and insight. The following narrative on WWOS demonstrates the interrelated aspects of these elements under the scope of ceremony and embraced as an approach to Indigenous methodologies.

Embodied Knowledge #3 – WWOS

To give a background, Walking With Our Sisters *is a collaborative art installation that includes handmade moccasin vamps (usually the most decorated part – the tops of moccasins) exhibited together to commemorate and honour the missing and*

murdered Indigenous women of Canada. An initiative of Métis artist Christi Belcourt, the installation made its first stop in Edmonton, Alberta at the University of Alberta on October 2, 2013. In mid-July 2012, Christi reached out through the vast space of social media and via word-of-mouth to call out for help in creating an installation that would honour the 600 or more Indigenous sisters, mothers, daughters, cousins, and granddaughters in Canada who have gone missing or have been murdered in the last twenty years.

People were asked to create original pairs of vamps and send them to Christi for compilation and organization for the collaborative art installation. However, three months before the deadline of July 17, 2013, the ultimate goal of 600 pairs seemed unlikely.

As it turned out, however, no one needed to worry about the numbers, because in true community spirit, the promises to send in vamps were kept. People finished their vamps and sent them to Christi in Espanola, Ontario. The final tally came to 1,726 pairs of moccasin vamps, created by over 1,300 individual artists. Christi and her assembled team prayed and feasted over the vamps in ceremony before packaging them up carefully and shipping them to the Keeper, Tanya Kappo, in Edmonton. The Edmonton team consisted of four members of the National Collective Tanya Kappo, Tara Kappo, Erin Konsmo, and me, as well as a local Elder, Pauline Paulson. Christi Belcourt and her friend Alo White came to Edmonton to work with us in installing this powerful art installation. Métis Elder Maria Campbell arrived from Saskatchewan, and her presence helped us form a strong sense of community. For me at least, her very company elicited a sense of calm and well-being – like you knew everything was going to work out just fine. Don't get me wrong, though – when her sharp blue eyes rested upon you, they told you there was a shitload of work to be done and nothing was going to get done if we just sat around feeling peaceful and calm. We rolled up our

sleeves, and after three 10-hour days, with at least a dozen volunteers each day, the installation was complete.

Prior to being involved in Walking With Our Sisters*, I attended ceremonies. From Sun Dance to sweat lodge, I've been blessed with compassionate and caring Elders, and my supportive family and friends. The ceremonies were fundamental to me reestablishing my connection with the Creator and opening up my mind and spirit. With every ceremony, I always felt a sense of peace and connectedness, not just to the Creator but to my ancestors as well. The sense of peace and well-being would last for a few days, and if the ceremony were especially powerful, the feeling would stay a week. Eventually, however, the busy realities of life and the everyday responsibilities of work, school, and family would overtake me, and the feeling would quietly dissipate like early morning mist in the sunlight.*

In the beginning, hosting Walking With Our Sisters *at the University of Alberta was a project that fit well with my portfolio as Special Advisor to the Provost. I had read online about Christi's request for moccasin vamps for this installation and I remember thinking to myself, "That sounds cool." I smile at this word in hindsight, and shake my head at my naïveté. Cool. If I had to describe a project like* Walking With Our Sisters *now, "cool" wouldn't be a likely contender. Words like "powerful," "innovative," and "life-changing" are much more fitting.*

Wilson claims that Indigenous research *is* ceremony. His work has been extremely useful in helping Indigenous scholars articulate a theoretical framework based in ceremony. It is my continuing[46] experiences with WWOS, reinforced by scholars like Wilson, that demonstrate the integral elements of ceremony: power, humility, spiritual cleansing, connection to spirit world, mnemonic devices, memorialization, protocol, gift-giving,

[46] Oskâpew says, "I am a member of the WWOS National Collective and continue to work with host communities to organize and install the WWOS memorial installation."

reciprocity, kinship/relationship, responsibility, feasting, honorariums, and sacrosanct bindings. These embodied experiences are brought to the forefront, "foregrounding the experiences of those researchers whose marginality is linked to race, sexuality, class, gender, age, and … ability" (Kimpson 75).

It has been difficult to uncover the moments when I began to conceptualize this seemingly simple art installation as a tool to help guide me in understanding Indigenous research methodologies. I found clarity in ceremony. On the opening day we had a ceremony at sunrise. 7:31am. My role was to provide some words after the ceremony to the assembled and welcome them on behalf of the university. The night before I had memorized a quick, but heartfelt welcome. The ceremony changed everything.

Elders Alo White, Maria Campbell, and Pauline Paulson, along with artist Christi Belcourt, led the ceremony, and as they called on the spirits to watch over the installation, the atrium reverberated with energy and power. I felt humbled as Pauline called to the vamps and Alo drummed and we sang. A powerful energy filled the room. And stayed. In the Cree language, Nehiyawewin, nouns are either animate or inanimate; there is no discernment between feminine and masculine. Something is alive or it isn't. After the calling in, the spirit of the Missing and Murdered women entered the space, and the vamps were animated.

Fast forward: it is time for me to welcome everyone on behalf of the university. The words stuck in my mouth and my throat closed off. This wasn't fear of public speaking. What was it? It was this moment a dawning realization came to me: I couldn't address the assembled crowd before me. My responsibility at that moment called for me to welcome our sisters. They were here! I told them that we were the ones that were honoured by their presence. It was for them that my words were meant. I welcomed

them, I honoured them, and I thanked them for being with us, for coming to this place, on Treaty Six territory on which the university now sits. I told them that we were there to take care of them and to keep them safe. I promised to do everything I possibly could to protect them. I promised that we would take care of them until the time came to pass them off to the next location. I did not thank the audience for being here; instead I thanked the sisters. Without once addressing the assembled crowd, I finished my welcome.

Ceremony lived. In this one moment, I realized that my address to the sisters rather than the crowd was about maintaining accountability to my relationship with them. As I reflected on my experience with WWOS, an idea began to take shape, and I realized that for the 11 days from the opening Calling-In Ceremony to the closing Calling Out, I was in total ceremony immersion. This wasn't a four-hour sweat lodge; it wasn't a four-day Sun Dance. It took a total immersion of 11 days in ceremony for me to understand how ceremony was an everyday part of my life. If understood properly, it could act as a bridge to strengthen my relationships with those around me and help raise the level of my consciousness. WWOS became the perfect experience for understanding how ceremony fit into all aspects of my life.

The WWOS project began with an idea by Métis artist Christi Belcourt. She simply wanted to honour the Missing and Murdered Indigenous women of Canada. She also wanted a distinctly Indigenous art memorial, and insisted the approach be guided by ceremony. Our Edmonton team had many situations and conflicts arise as we navigated between the restrictions of university policies and codes and the purpose and intent of the art memorial. We were urged by the Elders of WWOS to follow certain codes of conduct and, in every facet, honour the ceremonial elements that the memorial required. At first, our team found it challenging to honour the principles of ceremony consistently while working within the Western paradigm of a university. Together, the ceremonial concepts mentioned earlier –

power, humility, spiritual cleansing, connection to the spirit world, mnemonic devices, memorialization, protocol, gift-giving, reciprocity, feasting, kinship/relationship, responsibility, honoraria, and sacrosanct bindings – are natural in a ceremonial state, such as when one is attending sweat lodge or participating in a Sun Dance, but they are made to seem "unnatural" almost everywhere else, especially in the Western work environment of a university. I had disconnected these concepts from each other and from myself in every other realm in my life. My experience with WWOS changed this thinking. I see a great similarity between how I had disconnected the ceremonial concepts from everyday life and how the concepts of Indigenous erotics are also often severed from each other and from our daily lives. Wilson uses Tafoya's thoughts to warn that

> [p]ractices within the western paradigm can amputate your sexuality, your gender, your language and your spirituality, by looking at the individual components rather than by looking at the total person and the complexity of the connections and relationships that allow that individual to function. (19)

During the five days of the WWOS installation, Maria Campbell and Christi Belcourt constantly brought us back to these concepts and helped us apply the concepts of ceremony to the work of WWOS *and* our everyday lives. We built strong relationships with each other, and created a solid foundation of community for our volunteers and our participants. Our support for each other was implicit and continues to this day. WWOS created a living community, uniting people with a common goal (community = common + unity). We had almost hourly times sessions of smudging and teaching. Great care was always taken to introduce our volunteers to each other and to the team leads of the day. We invited each person to smudge and take his or her time to connect with the vamps and accompanying sacred bundle (which everyone began to refer to as "The Sisters").

Often volunteers stayed long after their shifts were over, or they would inevitably come back to volunteer again. These actions became a testament to the galvanization of the

community being built. While our focus had not been to create a community within the WWOS Edmonton exhibit, it happened all the same. The display of the vamps became as much of a concern as was the creation of a safe place to come to experience them. Our guests included many families and friends of the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters. Demonstrating the interconnectedness of the elements of Indigenous methodologies, the natural occurrence of relationship-building and community happened as we set out to design and create a space for the sacred bundle of WWOS in accordance with ceremonial protocol and guidelines.

Ceremony opens up a special space for dialogue, and our prayers become communication methods. We can converse with the spiritual realm without static, and without walls. When I spoke to my sisters, the audience that gathered watched and listened. I did not address them. Just as readers read Wilson's letters to his sons, the audience listened to me address others. The words were meant for the sisters, but also meant for the audience to hear.

By listening to me speak with the sisters, the audience learned indirectly. They learned about the responsibilities of the WWOS National collective, and the Edmonton Group. They learned about our role and our sense of duty to the sisters. The work with the sacred bundle – that is, WWOS – continues to be a deeply humbling experience in ceremony. It stays with me. This work, WWOS, began as prayer to the Creator and sparked an idea that gestated in one woman's mind. Since then, the project has generated a tremendous amount of energy and powerful connections. Teachings from the WWOS experience continue to be learned and shared as the installation moves from its first year, to the second, to the third, and on and on, until the last year – the seventh year, it will be put to rest. This ongoing project underpins the meaning behind the inclusion of relationships and responsibility as critical parts of Indigenous methodology. Unlike those involved with the play *Pig Girl,* we feel a sense of responsibility to everyone who enters the memorial.

> *We recruited counselors and Elders as volunteers to be on-site every hour the exhibit was open, if someone needed to talk or be debriefed about the exhibit. We provided sage for smudging, and had two rooms dedicated as debriefing rooms. One larger room provided a more intimate setting, giving participants a small amount of privacy to have tea, coffee, or snacks and to talk about the installation. The second room we kept for those participants who needed private one-on-one counseling. For eleven days, we remained vigilant about our guests, ready to provide gentle care and/or spiritual sustenance if the grief and sadness of the exhibit became too overwhelming.*

The same set of factors that oppress Indigenous peoples on a national level inhabit the walls of academia. *Power in My Blood* seeks to base itself in a paradigm that balances Indigenous practices like responsibility and relational accountability, without subscribing to what Len Findlay refers to in his article "Always Indigenize!" as a zealous defense of purity or objectivity. I don't intend to dwell on some ideal and static past of Indigenous people; rather, I hope to be a part of the "productive hybridity empowering faculty research and student curiosity" (181). The narratives of WWOS and the personal experience of *Pig Girl* used in the previous section are helpful in disrupting the colonial illusion, an illusion that endorses an "extractive" research process "on" Indigenous communities. The extractive process takes away from communities without giving back and denies the reciprocal principles of "All My Relations." An Indigenous research practice encourages readers to come to their own conclusions and rejects the notion that there is one truth. Findlay stresses that it is the Indigenous academic who must define what counts as knowledge, and suggests we forge "analogous solutions in Indigenously led, strategic interdisciplinarity, which draws on the fluid, permeable, holistic features of Indigenous knowledge to suspect or renegotiate academic territoriality" (312).

Embodied Knowledge #4 – Gondola

"She was just a fuckin' squaw, who cares?" Even through the layers of my fleece balaclava and my ski helmet, the words were thunder. It had been a perfect but chilly day of skiing at Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, and we were heading up the mountain for one last run. The gondola carried a total of eight passengers, and my daughters, then seven and nine, sat across from my best friend Shannon, and I. In the remaining seats sat four snowboarders. At -20, only die-hard skiers and snowboarders venture out, and when we do, we dress for it. With multiple layers, helmets, balaclavas, goggles and toques, the only uncovered part you see are the eyes. It was almost impossible to recognize people you knew, and sometimes even gender was impossible to decode.

As a diligent mother, not only did I listen to the girls' chatter and giggle about the last mogul run, but I also paid attention to the snowboarders' tales, making sure the stories were kept G-rated. One snowboarder's adventure the night before included some young Indigenous women from a nearby reserve; apparently, his amorous advances at the bar had not been welcomed. As his foul, final words on the matter resonated in our small, frosty space, the girls' laughter died in their throats, as did the smiles in their eyes. I could feel my daughters' eyes searching mine. My friend looked at me expectantly. Thinking it was the curse word that was offensive, the boarder followed their gaze to me and said, "Sorry, I didn't mean to swear." Our eyes locked and I removed my goggles and helmet. As I pulled my balaclava up and off my head, my two black braids fell heavily across my shoulders and the snowboarder was confronted by another outspoken squaw.

In that moment, I felt a powerful responsibility as an Indigenous woman and Indigenous mother. My friend tells me that my words were eloquent and powerful, I

> *can't remember. It did not matter what he took from this interaction; my words weren't meant for him or his friends. The words were meant for my daughters.*

At the time of this writing, the Conservative government of Canada[47] refuses to acknowledge the current level of systemic violence against Indigenous women and girls, in just the same way it has denied its history of colonialism. At the G20, in 2009 during a press conference, Prime Minister Stephen Harper declared that, "We [Canada] … also have no history of colonialism" (Harper). Harper's words add to the one-sided version of Canada's "history" that claims that we are a country whose citizens all enjoy equal democratic rights and freedoms. In fact, not all of us do. The history of colonialism is still being felt today. Indigenous women and girls do not live free from systemic racism or sexual and gendered violence. Indigenous women and girls in Canada are 3.5 times more likely to experience violence and five times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous women (NWAC). Inside and outside our communities, Indigenous women and girls are not safe; 75 percent of sexual assaults in our communities are against young women under 18 years old. Of these women, them, 50 percent are under age 14, and 25 percent are under the age of seven (NWAC). In a letter outlining her outrage about the violence against Indigenous women and girls to the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, LaRocque writes:

> The portrayal of the squaw is one of the most degraded, most despised and most dehumanized anywhere in the world. The 'squaw' is the female counterpart to the Indian male 'savage' and as such she has no human face; she is lustful, immoral, unfeeling and dirty. Such grotesque dehumanization has rendered all Native women and girls vulnerable to gross physical, psychological and sexual violence … I believe that there is a direct relationship between these horrible racist/sexist stereotypes and violence against Native women and girls. (1)

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[47] Oskâpew says, "As I was in the midst of further revisions, the Liberal party, led by Justin Trudeau, came into power on October 19, 2015. Two months after the election, on December 8th, Trudeau called for an inquiry into MMIW."

My research calls attention to these prevailing attitudes about Indigenous women and girls as described by LaRocque. That is, in order to be accountable in my work, I must address present-day colonization and its continuous violation of Indigenous rights. I must also include what I feel are the positive possibilities for transformation and change, particularly in Indigenous work that configures and demonstrates alternative ideas about Indigenous sexuality and gender.

My research is instigated by the appalling statistical truths of the undeniable sexual and gendered violence that targets Indigenous women and girls, as well as Two-Spirit and genderful folk. Without action by the Canadian government, and with very little concern voiced by the Canadian population, these women, girls and genderful folk continue to be violated and brutalized. Canada's quest to colonize the land required the colonization of its Indigenous population as well; policies of assimilation, extermination, and subjugation were used to to colonize Indigenous bodies, and consequently colonize the land. Our dispossession of the land required that we be dispossessed of our bodies (Andrea Smith). Through these policies, the regulation of our bodies (sexuality, spirituality, and genders) is controlled by the colonizing government. The crushing forces of heteropatriarchal evangelization and oversexualization of our bodies has led to the dehumanization of Indigenous peoples today.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Society is witness to the continued, targeted, sexual and gendered violence against Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. Is there a solution that would end the violence? What is the connection between our having been dispossessed of ancestral lands and of our bodies (stolen lands = stolen bodies)? Is corporeal sovereignty attainable if we embrace the Indigenous erotic as a reimagined state of being? As Indigenous people, communities, nations, and leaders, how do we enact the principles of "All My Relations" in our quest for healing and sovereignty?
2. Are there alternative ways of understanding our Indigenous sexuality and gender as opposed to the current dominant heteropatriarchal normative? Can expressions of Indigenous erotica hold the key to empowerment? To corporeal sovereignty? What beliefs, principles, and understandings are found within expressions of erotica that can be used to transcend the impact of oppression and colonialism?

My journey has been, and remains, a search for meaning and understanding of my place in the world. I continue to ask myself whether I have contributed to making the world a better place. I seek a method for decolonizing our Indigenous bodies, a way to understand myself and my connections to the world more deeply. To engage in an Indigenous erotic is to explore all the passions and sensations within ourselves, and the practices of reciprocity, balance, and mutual respect towards others. I want the result of my contributions to be that Indigenous girls, women, Two-Spirit and genderful folk become erotic warriors who celebrate the power of their intellect and emotions and embrace the spiritual, physical, and sexual power that they hold within themselves. I want them to be free from sexual and gendered violence. My research proposes an Indigenous methodological practice that offers a different approach to attaining corporeal sovereignty. And finally, intrepid reader,

KISKINOWASIHTA

(listen carefully, so that you'll know and remember after)

For the past five hundred years, Indigenous people's gender and sexuality have been corrupted and demonized as often as they have been silenced and romanticized. The intergenerational fallout of five hundred years of sexual oppression and genocide by the colonial system manifests itself in every statistic that describes Aboriginal people, including those regarding women, health, poverty, education, and the justice system. These prevailing narratives echo in the media, at all levels of governments, and in the hallways of our great educational institutions, and reverberate in our own communities. Engaging in an eroticanalysis practice, I investigate how Indigenous erotics may function as a potential site for decolonization through its ability to reimagine and transform how we view Indigenous gender and sexuality. Embracing the Indigenous erotic holds the possibility of decolonization, as once we begin to acknowledge and actualize every dimension of our being, we can reclaim the whole of the individual.

As "erotic knowledge empowers us" (57), Lorde argues, we must begin to think deeply about what those knowledges may be and how they are comprised. As Indigenous peoples with complex histories, we carry about different embodied knowledges; what are they? If we are to, as Lorde suggests, "scrutinize all aspects of our existence," then we must explore the beliefs we hold about ourselves, including (but not limited to) those regarding our bodies, our land, our spirituality, our sovereignty, and the connection to the principles of, "All My Relations." My "scrutiny," then, investigates narratives and visual expressions of Indigenous erotica. Much work has been done by Indigenous writers and artists that speaks to the historical sexual trauma of colonialism, but a far higher number of voices has been stifled altogether. Unresolved grief, despair, and internalized oppression have silenced discussions on gender diversity, sexuality, sexual identity, changing roles, and intimacy in many Indigenous communities. Indigenous erotica can serve as a medium to break down barriers of shame and self-hatred that may be connected with sexuality.

In the closing of this chapter, I hope that the inclusion of this Nehiyaw'iskwew research method provides a relatable approach to how you, intrepid reader, can work with other Indigenous texts and also offers a platform for mutual thinking between us. This paper should not be reduced to a simple transference of knowledge, but should be seen as an opportunity for you to reflect and form a relationship with me and the text. For my part, I will continue to support you with "tools" such as the voice of the oskâpew and continue to "locate" myself to establish the temporal, spatial, and emotional context for our interaction and mutual understanding.

KISKINOWASIHTA.

Say this word slowly. Kis-ki-no–waa-seeh-taa

Let the sounds float on your tongue, and live in your mouth. Say it loud; louder. Then whisper the word.

I want you to … (listen carefully, so that you'll know and remember after)

CHAPTER TWO - THE EROTIC MOTIF

Embodied Knowledge #5 – Teaching Erotica

I sat down to mark the third and final hand-in of the Visually Active Journals (VAJs)[48] written by my "guinea pig" students in the pilot class called Native Studies 280, Indigenous Erotica, in the summer session of 2014. The topic of the day had been, "Name a time in your life when you experienced the erotic." What these students had to say filled me with a sense of hope, elation, and gladness.

A pilot project, this course was supported by the Faculty of Native Studies and garnered the interest of 14 intrepid erotic warriors. This three week, three-credit course, had a description that read: "Indigenous people of North America have had sex on the brain since time immemorial. As the fastest-growing population in Canada, Aboriginal people not only think about it, they engage in it. Indigenous erotica has a long history and this is reflected in the diversity of texts and visual representations of sexuality and gender. Our discussions and analyses include aspects of the social, political, historical, spiritual, and intellectual realms and serve as a platform to disrupt the heteropatriarchal normative discourses. Indigenous erotica is a methodology with which to engage in a critical dialogue on the traditional understandings of Indigenous bodies and their established belief systems surrounding sexuality and gender. It is a way to challenge the socially constructed gender and sexuality categories imposed by the dominant culture. Armed with a fluid understanding of the consequences of the historical sexual trauma on Indigenous people by the colonial regime, Indigenous erotica will serve as a map for reclamation. In other words, it serves not only as a

[48] Oskâpew says, "The Visually Active Journals are also known as VAJs. These journals are the primary way in which students communicated to me their understandings of the course's readings and lectures. Using words and images, students recorded their observations and reflected on their emotional reactions, feelings, and/or inner experiences. Students were encouraged to use poems, lyrics, articles, and stories supplemented by visual images such as photos, sketches, drawings, and collages."

reclamation of our bodies, but a source of joy, a place of political action and sovereignty."

My goal in the creation and implementation of this course was to understand the practice of the erotic. I had written so much on the Indigenous erotic as a source of corporeal sovereignty that I wondered how it could work in practice within an academic setting. The first VAJ entry that stunned me contained a photo of Semmi[49] in the mountains paddleboarding on a lake. She was standing up with the paddle over her head, her face clearly showing joy and exhilaration. She wrote that prior to this class, she had thought about the erotic in terms of sexuality and sex, never realizing that the erotic extended to the celebration of other physical pleasures. Semmi related that she was terrified to go out onto the lake, she was afraid of falling in and looking foolish. But her desire to revel in the physicality and sensuality of the moment overcame her fears. She paddled around the lake for hours, enjoying the strength and mastery of her body. Semmi said that our class helped her to recognize the erotic, and she fully intended to seek out more of the erotic in her life.

The second student's VAJ entry was equally revelatory. Dakota[50] was a spectator at powwow and out of the corner of his eye he spied a mother in a jingle dress kneeling down by what looked like a three- or four-year-old boy. They were getting ready for the grand entry, and she was adjusting his porcupine roach headband to go with his grass dancer regalia. Although the stadium was full of the vibrancy, colours, and the sounds of people and drums, he felt everything go quiet as he watched the intimate scene. The woman's face glowed with pride and her eyes shone with love as she looked at her son. The boy's chin lifted up, and, biting his bottom lip with a shy smile, he stared back into his mother's eyes. Dakota said he felt strangely overcome with

[49] Oskâpew says, "This name has been changed to protect the student's privacy."
[50] Oskâpew says, "This name has also been changed to protect the student's privacy."

emotion. Reflecting on this moment, he said that prior to this course, he would never have described this scene as erotic. But as an Indigenous man, he saw that this moment captured so many of the beautiful aspects of his people. Dakota saw the Indigenous erotic as a source of hope and love and a revitalization of culture. Afterwards – especially during his difficult days as a youth care worker – he revisited the scene of the mother and son in his mind. The experience became a place of solace and of bliss, where he envisioned the erotic as a force in reclaiming Indigenous identities and building strong communities.

Many of the final VAJ entries were similar in thought, though differing in expression. I was inspired by the students' location of the erotic and the body as sites for potential liberation from oppression. Their erotic experiences embodied the excellence in human experience. But I was not prepared for what I found in the next VAJ. This student placed a lengthy note to me in an envelope in his journal encouraging me to open it and read. I wasn't surprised at the effort of an extra note in his journal, as he was always an enthusiastic participant in class. He contributed thoughtful and intelligent ideas to our discussions and was admired for his confidence and humour. The note explained that Brad[51] came back to university after an accident left him unable to work in his former field. As with many men and women in jobs that require extreme physical fitness, his body and physicality were a source of pride for Brad. The accident changed everything. Even after undergoing several intensive surgeries, he was still unable to walk without assistance. His note shared the devastation he felt as he watched his body become something he didn't recognize. His identity revolved around his physical capabilities, which he associated with his masculinity. He became severely depressed and often thought about killing himself. The note explained that his

[51] Oskâpew says, "I have debated with myself whether or not to include this story. Even as I use the fake name of Brad for this student, and I have been given permission, I still feel torn in sharing his personal note. However, his resiliency and strength moves me and reveals the incredible potential of the erotic to heal, nurture and reimagine our identities, bodies and desires."

understanding of the erotic had been extremely limited prior to taking the course, and thought taking this summer course would be a welcome distraction from his current reality. He said he didn't realize how it would change his life. Through the readings on Indigenous erotica, the visual art, poetry, the self-reflective VAJs and intense class discussions, Brad recognized new areas of strength and possibility within himself. He said he thought about the erotic as a repossession of his agency and reimagining of his identity and self. He could begin to see how the erotic was a productive space in achieving excellence in all aspects of himself – not just his body. Brad's words moved me deeply. Tears flowed down my face before I finished reading his letter. I read the last line: "Thank you for everything, for you, for your passion for teaching Indigenous erotica. You won't believe me, but you have literally *saved my life." I doubt I will ever receive a note such as this again from a student. I keep it with me and return to it when I feel doubt or hesitation about my path*. *These are places of the erotic.*

Go get a piece of paper to draw and write on. It could be newsprint, a scrap piece from the recycling or a luxurious piece of paper that you have been saving. Now using whatever writing implement you have available (pen, pencil, chocolate) write out an erotic place of your own.

Knowing and embracing the erotic gives me access to so much more awareness of sensuality and beauty. I will share a few places of my erotic, with you, reader:

1. Drifting to sleep with my dog curled up at my feet
2. The pain of my cheeks and belly after laughing
3. The smell of babies and puppies
4. Sweat dripping down my back

There is magic in these students' stories, and I am transformed by them. Do you see, intrepid reader, how an awareness of the erotic can grow with and within the experiences of others? I begin this chapter with these narratives because, despite my best efforts in explaining the erotic and erotica, any definition would pale in comparison to the actual experience of the erotic. Let us take a historical look at the word *erotic*. It comes from the Greek word *eros*, meaning the embodiment of all aspects of love; but today the erotic, as an adjective, is narrowly defined as "of, concerning, or arousing sexual desire or giving sexual pleasure," and the noun is defined as "marked by strong sexual desire or being especially sensitive to sexual stimulation" (Collins). Audre Lorde expands on this definition and defines the erotic as a source of spiritual power for women, a celebration of the erotic as a part of our everyday lives, and notes that that the erotic is not limited to sexual desire and sexual pleasure. She states:

> Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, nor the merely safe. (57)

Students Semmi and Dakota recognized that the erotic extends to every aspect of our usual lives. Semmi found the erotic as she trusted and reveled in her body's abilities, and Dakota saw the revitalization of an entire nation in one brief moment. Daniel Heath Justice warns that Indigenous peoples working towards decolonization can't afford to ignore "sex and embodied pleasure" as a source of empowerment. He states that "[t]he indigenous body is more than flesh, blood, and bone … Native bodies are sites of both colonized conflict and passionate decolonization" (2008, 161). Extending Justice's thought slightly, I would suggest that there is a danger in relying too much on one aspect of our being, as, in doing so, we become unbalanced. Hinging our worth and desire on only one facet of our

magnificent existence has two consequences: the first is that the single-minded, concentrated attention paid to one part of your identity may leave you disoriented and lost if that feature disappears. The second issue stemming from blindness to the full spectrum of the erotic is the loss of a potential skill or talent that goes unrecognized due to myopic attention focused elsewhere. Lorde states that "[t]he erotic is a site of potential that unifies and evolves the amalgamation of all the facets that encompasses the bodily experience" (55). As well, Lorde and Indigenous scholars like Justice, Akiwenzie-Damm, Womack, and Chris Teuton (member of the Cherokee Nation) claim that the erotic can be a site for liberation and empowerment against an oppressive, patriarchal, and anti-erotic society.

One of the oldest known erotic texts is the ancient Indian text of the *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana.* While many have heard of the *Kama Sutra* and remember it for its detailed drawings of sexual positions, the *Kama Sutra* actually reveals a critical interpretation of the erotic. Written over 1,800 years ago, in the second century CE, this text gives advice on erotic practice, along with practical advice on behaviour leading up to, during, and after sexual activities. The author explicitly states:

> This work is not intended to be used merely as an instrument for satisfying our desires. A person, acquainted with the true principles of this science, and who preserves his Dharma [virtue or religious merit], Artha [worldly wealth], and Kama [pleasure or sensual gratification], and has a regard for the practices of the people is sure to obtain the mastery over his senses. In short, an intelligent and prudent person, attending to Dharma and Artha, and attending to Kama also, without becoming a slave to his passions, obtains success in everything that he may undertake. (172)

Considered by many to be the foremost guide on the erotic, the *Kama Sutra* is a text of erotic enlightenment demonstrating that the mind and the body are inscribed with erotic areas that respond to physical and mental sensations. As the erotic is interpreted in the

following chapters, the *Kama Sutra* adds to the understanding of the erotic experience as an attainment of human completeness. Philosopher Georges Bataille wrote *Erotism: Death & Sexuality*[52] in the late 1950s. Similar to the *Kama Sutra* and Lorde's work, Bataillie emphasizes the importance of "continuity" in sexuality, meaning humans should appreciate how the erotic is not limited to the realm of sex, but is an ethos that reaches out into all elements of our lives. He claims, "We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of incomprehensible adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity" (60–61). Desires fulfilled may lead to pleasure and ecstasy, and this is one of the potential gifts of the erotic. In the same way that Driskill, Rifkin, and Chrystos demonstrate, Bataille also encourages people to push boundaries, and argues that "Eroticism always entails a breaking down of established patterns ... of the regulated social order" (75).

INDIGENOUS EROTIC

So what is the **Indigenous** erotic? The understanding of the erotic within the *Kama Sutra* and the terms of the erotic as set out by Lorde lay a good foundation for the exploration of the Indigenous erotic. As you have likely noticed, *Power in My Blood* often stands with Lorde's work "The Uses of the Erotic" when discussing the erotic motif. To subvert dominant power structures, Lorde examines the power of the erotic as deeply rooted in the feminine and the spiritual plane, and sees the erotic as a woman-based consciousness able to overcome the oppressive forces of often male-dominated Western society (88). Lorde often explains the erotic as an "assertion of the lifeforce of women" (89) and for "women-identified women" (91), but the Indigenous erotic expands this understanding as to an erotic power available to all genders. Unrestricted by the gender binary of male/female, the Indigenous erotic is a powerful state of embodied pleasure and sensuality that originates from a synthesis of Indigenous memories, practices, and emotions

[52] Oskâpew says, "I am hesitant to include Bataille in the scope of the erotic, because many of his dark philosophical tenets about death and the erotic have little or no bearing on my course of study. However, there are some similarities between some of his concepts and other erotic theorists that I admire."

– and most importantly, it recognizes that we are situated and informed by "All My Relations." The erotic is a place of sublime consciousness and complete empowerment of our minds and bodies; we are fulfilled as we engage and involve all the passions and sensations within ourselves. The Indigenous erotic includes this complete awareness of self, but it *also* extends to modes of Indigenous kinship practices of "All My Relations" – of reciprocity, balance, and mutual respect. I would extend Lorde's erotic foundation to include Justice and Driskill's understandings of the Indigenous erotic as a state of reimagining the corporeal coalescence of our sexualities, genders, histories, memories and emotions, and of its function as a powerful decolonizing mechanism. Empowered by the joyful and confident sensations of the Indigenous erotic and unified with the strength of "All My Relations," we can surpass the subjugated, shamed, and poisoned notions of our sexual selves and enter into a decolonized reality. The Indigenous erotic includes principles of "All My Relations" and indicates my relationship with, and responsibility to, missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. In our race towards sovereign nationhood, Indigenous leaders, communities, and organizations often neglect the responsibilities we have to all our kin. We fail to understand that attaining sovereignty as a nation can only occur when "All My Relations" have corporeal sovereignty. Driskill argues, "Our relationships with the erotic impact our larger communities, just as our communities impact our senses of the erotic. A Sovereign Erotic relates our bodies to our nations, traditions and histories" (52).

The word "Indigenous" in the context of *Power in My Blood*, means "one born of the land" or "one who springs from the land," and acknowledges Indigenous peoples as inextricably linked to the land and deeply bonded with the sacred places of their ancestors. Generations of land dispossession and horrific land removal policies have not destroyed the spiritual connection to our ancestral lands; Indigenous people have endured because the stories and memories are carried through the culture. I see the Indigenous erotic functioning as a site of resistance and a powerful instrument of decolonization, a device with which to engage in

a critical dialogue on the socially constructed gender and sexuality categories imposed by the dominant culture. The Indigenous erotic becomes a battlefield to challenge and usurp the current rule of the heteropatriarchal normative monarchy. Daniel Heath Justice claims, "To ignore sex and embodied pleasure in the cause of Indigenous liberation is to ignore one of our greatest resources. It is to deny us one of our most precious gifts. Every orgasm can be an act of decolonization" (106). Reader, do you ever reflect deeply on your own histories, memories, and connections and question your place in the world? Indigenous erotics at its best is a place where the sensualities of your mind, body, and spirit reunite. For Indigenous peoples, erotics has potential to be our Indigeneity in its best form, a storm of colliding realms of the social, the political, the historical, the physical, the spiritual and the intellectual. Lorde states that the erotic embodies the fact "[t]hat bridging is much more than bringing together the past and present or the need to bring together the personal and the political or the spiritual and the social. It is the connection between self and the world in which that self exists" (56).

Tell me, have you eroticized yourself yet?

A critical part of the decolonization process is the reimagining of our words and our visual representations of our sexuality. Rifkin points out that "[t]he erotic in these accounts speaks to a sense of embodied and emotional wholeness that includes but extends beyond the scenes and practices of sexual pleasure and gratification usually termed sexual" (2012, 27). Like ceremony, Indigenous erotics acts as a bridge to bring us closer together as human beings as we connect through the sensual, the physical, the spiritual, and emotional. Wilson shares a similar sentiment to those of Hanohano's wise words:

> So the space between people is Kapu, is sacred, and you go through a ceremony and respect each other's space … the distance or relationship between ourselves and the

> environment is sacred, and so you do ceremonies to bridge that space or that distance. (87)

Just as bridging space and distance among each other and the cosmos is foundational in ceremony, the Indigenous erotic also embodies this concept of interrelatedness. Wholly embracing the sensual, sexual, emotional, physical, and spiritual sides of ourselves bridges the distance between the cosmos and ourselves. Indigenous erotics, like the practice of ceremony, cannot be separated from everyday life actions. Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, author and publisher of Indigenous erotica, speaks to Indigenous erotic manifestations, saying:

> Indigenous erotic literature is often an attempt to reach out, to touch and, for a moment, to hold beauty aloft. It reflects and affirms our connections with other aspects of the natural world, such as animals, birds, plants, the land, the sky, the water, the elements. In doing so it reminds us who we are and that we are intimately connected to all that surrounds us. (119)

The Indigenous erotic is a site to invoke our deepest desires and conjure up our hidden dreams, and a place to remember the significant people and places that have touched our hearts, minds, and bodies. Vera Wabegijig's (Anishnaabe) erotic poem about Coyote, discussed below, also reminds us of stories of our kin, of tricksters and shapeshifters like Raven, Wisahkecahk, Coyote, or Nanabozho. I read Coyote's erotic adventure and I am twice pleasured; Coyote arouses my sensual parts, but his culturally recognizable trickster character stimulates my Nehiyaw'iskwew mind. He reminds me that I share a connection to other Indigenous people. Our shared qualities, traits, histories, and hopes for decolonization interconnect us; this knowing gives me pride, and gives me power. Do you remember Dakota's erotic moment, reader? Think back to how he watched the mother and son; remember how the intimate scene filled him with a sense of hope? A hope for the future of his nation and pride in his people? Like Dakota's memory, Coyote's adventure (and other Indigenous erotica) can act as markers of cultural power and tribal identity.

Sometimes the erotic isn't entirely clear; sometimes it is at first unrecognizable, yet eerily familiar. Indigenous erotics has the potential to illuminate deep, forgotten passions. It is the relief I feel when those fading wisps of a sweet, lingering dream (to which I so desperately tried to cling to) are revealed. Indigenous erotics is the grown adult finally understanding those fuzzy childhood memories. In my adult mind I realize what my aunties were cackling at, late at night as I listened under the kitchen table. My aunties talked and laughed about their sexual escapades as they played cards. In the sharing of the erotic, Indigenous artists, painters, writers, poets all share deeply with their audiences. Even though we may not be Anishnaabek, Nehiyawak, Kanien'keha':ka,[53] or Aniuyunwiya,[54] we now share a space, a bridge of the erotic that can be the basis for understanding. "The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of difference" (Lorde 56). Erotics is a place of serenity, calmness, a place where we are wholly accepted, a place of immeasurable centredness. What was once ugly becomes beautiful, what once was sin is now sacred. Gregory Scofield reminds us that embracing the erotic is "about making new medicine, about creating new stories and new songs based upon those experiences, healing with those things and allowing ourselves to become whole and healthy individuals" (118). It is a place of solitude and of multitude, of both insecurity and empowerment. Remember Lorde's words? As we understand erotics in this context, she says,

> our erotic knowledge empowers us

(59). Disrupting the social order, for Indigenous erotics, may also mean working to disrupt the current colonial views on gender and sexuality. We are not born as fully functioning "men" or "women," we acquire these restrictive gender identities through a social process.

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[53] Oskâpew says, "Also known as Mohawk peoples."
[54] Oskâpew says, "Although the official Cherokee Nation (www.cherokee.org) (Aniuyunwiya) refer to themselves as the Cherokee Nation, they may also refer to themselves as Tsalagi."

If gender and sexuality are culturally and socially constructed, one may ask whose "culture" and whose "society" have constructed these genders. In the case of Indigenous people, photos of residential schoolchildren reveal the masculine/feminine binary: the cis females (those seen as biological females) have had their long hair cut into the same hairstyle, a shoulder-length or short bob and bangs; they wear dresses, or skirts, often with white-collared shirts underneath. The cis males' (those seen as biological males) heads are shaved; they wear pants, belts, and button-up shirts.[55] The colonial implementation of a gender binary is part of a system aimed at controlling and regulating Indigenous bodies. The potential for the erotic, then, is the repositioning of our understanding of gender and sexuality, and provides an atmosphere for transformation and reimaginings. An eroticanalysis is the exploration and interpretation of the erotic and requires us to answer the question, "What is it to be human?" Further, how does the execution of gender and sexuality intersect with other aspects of our humanity? The relationship between gender and sexuality are intricately complex, and the erotic is deeply entwined with both. The erotic has a deep and complex relationship with humanity.

INDIGENOUS EROTICA

Indigenous erotica is a genre that locates and celebrates the Indigenous erotic and acts as a medium for the actualization of the sovereignty of our Indigenous bodies. It is visual and written expressions of the erotic by Indigenous people through various forms of media, including writing, film, and visual art. Indigenous erotica serves as a map for reclamation of our bodies, land, and sovereignty as nations. In my analysis of novels of Indigenous erotica, particularly in Boyden's and Justice's novels and Niska and Tarsa respectively, there are five recurring elements: **reimaginings** (nonconformity, resistance, and subversion, and alternative ways of envisioning the past, present, and future), **corporeal sovereignty**

[55] Oskâpew says, "The title of Robert Alexie's *Porcupines and China Dolls* references the appearance of the girls, who look like china dolls with their bobbed hair and their starched white dresses, and of the boys, with their hair as short and bristly as the quills of porcupines."

(agency, authority over oneself, choice, the sensuality of everyday life), **kinship** (relationship ties and the connection to people and places), **gender** (decentring Western European tropes of femininity and masculinity), and the **ongoing collective** (language and culture through generational narratives, stories, communal language and memory).[56] These concepts are employed as we explore the expressions of Indigenous erotics embodied within the characters of Niska and Tarsa. These themes will be used to analyze the texts critically in the next two chapters.

INDIGENOUS EROTICA IN VISUAL ART

Remember Shawn Hunt's *Hotbox?* Retrieve your reflections and take a look at it again (p.55). Read the following reflections on *Hotbox*.
Did you notice things I did not?
Did I see something that you hadn't thought of?
How are our viewpoints different? The same?

Hotbox is made of redwood cedar, beaver fur, pink satin, and acrylic paint. Exhibited in 2013 at *RezErect: Native Erotica*, Hunt's work was one of the many pieces of art exploring the sensual and erotic nature of Indigeneity. Apart from the obvious sexual connotations that the words "hot" and "box" embody, *Hotbox* also challenges the "expectations" of traditional Indigenous art forms and Indigenous sexuality. The sensually clever use of luxurious materials like beaver fur demonstrates a playful attitude toward sex. Beaver fur signifies past and present Indigenous endeavours of trapping and hunting, and also takes advantage of colloquialisms of the English language – the slang use of the word *beaver* to mean vagina. The lid, opened slightly, coyly reveals a secret pink interior, perhaps a reminder of a time of unashamed, guilt-free attitudes towards sexuality. At first glance, Hunt's *Hotbox,* covered in fur, does not seem to resemble the highly collectible bentwood redwood cedar boxes of Northwest coastal people. While those are often painted with

[56] Oskâpew says, "These concepts will be explained in depth later in this chapter."

recognizable ovoid shapes and graceful forms of the Northwest coast, Hunt's cedar box is covered top to bottom in luxurious beaver fur. Inside, the box is layered in pink satin material and fleshy pink paint. Hunt plays on the commercial popularity of bentwood cedar boxes, but denies the viewer the "expected" Northwest Coast designs usually carved or painted on the outside. Instead, *Hotbox* is an unmistakably Indigenous and beautiful portrayal of a vagina. To understand this erotic piece, we begin with the process of making a bentwood box. Step one starts with a single cedar plank that is slowly steamed and patiently bent into the shape of a box – the technique giving the form its name. Hunt's *Hotbox* suggests that the same loving care and patience that goes into "readying" the vessel – that is, the bentwood box – corresponds to the passion and attention to the vagina required in foreplay. Hunt suggests that sensual body parts (like vaginas) need to be handled with proper care and respect initially before one moves on to the next step – whatever that may be! Like Northwest coast people and their boxes, Hunt continues to prepare his *Hotbox* for use – he lines it with silky material and paints the inside top of the box. Now, bentwood cedar boxes have many uses – they may be used for burials, cooking, food storage, transportation, and storing valuables like masks, jewelry, regalia, and sacred objects. With the inside complete, the *Hotbox* is ready. But what is it ready for? Will it be a vessel for anything, or admired from afar? What would you use a hotbox for?

Curator Morgan Wood describes Indigenous erotic art as:

> a vehicle for deadpan moral satire
> too comic to be pornographic
> titillating
> juicy
> like abandoned crutches in the church of love. (9)

Indigenous erotica in Hunt's art, like the "abandoned crutches in the church of love," is used as a tool for the reclamation of his Heiltsuk erotic self. I suggest that his "abandonment of crutches," then, is his leaving behind restrictive beliefs about sex,

sexuality, and gender. He is "healed" in the "church of love" through his acceptance of the erotic in his life. He is "too comic to be pornographic" and deviates from the expected cultural normative (covering a bentwood cedar box in beaver fur). Hunt disrupts repressive sexual boundaries, becoming a "vehicle for deadpan moral satire" with a representation of a "cheeky" and unabashedly proud vagina. The bold beauty of Indigenous erotica allows us the freedom to express and celebrate our sensuality, sexuality, and genders as Indigenous peoples.

INDIGENOUS EROTICA IN POETRY

Indigenous erotica in the form of a poem by Vera Wabegijig reveals how the erotic is the condition of fulfillment of the sensual and sexual through our emotions and bodily sensations:

coyote jumps me at night while i relax and do some yoga poses

downward dog
with my legs spread apart and ass in the air
and my hand planted on the hardwood floor

he grins and sometimes he howls

coyote's back arches and his mouth points to the sky
his silhouette against a full moon and framed by the window
as long sheer curtains blow across our bare skin
the wind dries the dripping sweat on our bodies

coyote dominates

humps me from behind
he is alpha for the moment

he knows all too well that this is how it starts
but not how it will end

soon, very soon,
as the moon travels the night sky
our shadows crawl across the floor to the wall

i will jump coyote
i will dominate
i will be the one howling with my mouth in a perfect o

to the moon raised far above me
and our shadows will stop and stare (1–21)

Wabegijig's poem is saucy, sexual, and scintillating; as she summons the Indigenous trickster tropes with the Coyote character, "coyote's back arches and his mouth points to the sky" (5). The trickster is a character that comes from tribal knowledges, and the concept of the "ongoing collective" includes communal language and memory. The poem is contemporary and humorous; the speaker invokes one of the most widely recognized yoga poses, "downward facing dog." Did you laugh as I did at this *canine* sexual practice in which the "downward dog" (1) submits sexually to the coyote? I look to find the "gender" of the "downward dog" character, but nothing is revealed; neither is the physical form that the speaker takes. Human? Animal? Spirit being? Wabegijig manages to disrupt our sexual sensibilities, and the ambiguity of the "downward dog" character points to alternate sexual relationships. This relays the element of interrelatedness of all living things. The intimate and sensual connection between "downward dog" and Coyote relays the many intimate (not necessarily sexual) connections we make, as human-to-human, human-to-animal, animal-to-animal, human-to-spirit being, etc. Or perhaps the "downward dog" character is left genderless because the character is me. Or you. I am/you–we are part of this sensual scene. Wabegijig pulls readers inextricably into the poem … it is *my* legs that are spread apart and that is *my* ass in the air, with *my* hand planted firmly on the floor. I think about this poem now, every time I go to hot yoga class — the erotic Coyote has infiltrated my brain and my body. I think of Coyote behind me, as I sweat in a hot, darkened room with 20 other people. My legs are apart and my ass is in the air; I watch the sweat drip down my brown arms as I stretch out my shoulders, legs, and neck. Wabegijig's poem brought the Indigenous erotic into a realm I used to think of as the ordinary everyday.

This poem portrays acts of pleasure – "the coyote's back arches … he grins … and he howls" (4–5) and "i will be the one howling with my mouth in a perfect o" (19) – as an

embodied sensation of "corporeal sovereignty." There is a balance of power, each exhibiting agency included in the element of "corporeal sovereignty": "coyote dominates, humps me from behind, he is alpha for the moment" (9–11). Neither entirely submits to the other, as the "downward dog" asserts in the end: "I will jump coyote, I will dominate" (17–18). Back in class, I hear the yoga instructor softly murmur, "And now, we head back into downward dog," and I smile, and think about Coyote climbing on top of the person in front of me. Wabegijig's poem represents the revitalizing role Indigenous erotica performs as the "downward dog" and Coyote playfully engage with elements of "re-imagining," "corporeal sovereignty," "gender," and the "ongoing collective." As seductive and clever as Coyote, the erotic infiltrates my thoughts, enticing me to savour and reside within the erotic realm.

Indigenous erotica is artistic expression stemming from a spectrum of cultural and tribal beliefs about sexuality, sexual identity, sensuality and gender; this also includes the sexual, emotional, physical, and spiritual experiences, histories, and knowledges held by Indigenous people. Drew Hayden Taylor once wrote that when he was talking about his upcoming book on Native sexuality, people told him that Indigenous erotica was a type of an oxymoron;[57] they also joked that a book on Native sexuality would be a very short book (Taylor 1). This joke indicates that Indigenous erotica was once quite limited in quantity and accessibility, but now I see it as a fast-growing genre that spans many mediums, and includes written and spoken word and visual arts. I've mentioned that since 1999, there have been at least two art exhibits of Indigenous erotica: *EXPOSED: Aesthetics of Aboriginal Erotic Art* and *RezErect: Native Erotica.*

I attended *RezErect* and was stimulated and delighted. Like many early spring days in Vancouver, on the February afternoon in 2013 when I visited the Bill Reid Gallery to see *RezErect*, the rain fell in heavy sheets. But no amount of stormy weather could have kept me away. I felt fortunate that this exhibition of Indigenous erotica proved to be so popular

[57] Oskâpew says, "This is when juxtaposing elements appear contradictory."

that it was held over for an extra week. This holdover meant that my work trip coincided with the exhibit. There were many standouts for me, but I particularly enjoyed a sensual piece in a short but powerful video called "Put The Lights On" by Hannah Leona (Cree/Irish/Ukrainian) and Alida Kinnie Starr (mixed blood/Mohawk). While there were brighter, shinier visual pieces, such as Shawn Hunt's *Hotbox* or Kwiaahwah Jones's *Sexy Rhythms*, I was mesmerized by the screen that had a continuous loop of two Indigenous people, a man and a woman. The video footage of "Put The Lights On" was an extreme close-up of an Indigenous woman braiding an Indigenous man's hair. In the second half of the footage, the roles were reversed, and he braided her hair. At first I only noticed the raw sensuality and physical intimacy of this simple practice. The longer I watched, the more I began to think about Indigenous bodies and the ways in which we affirm our bonds and recognize the shared "Indigenousness" of each other. I believe the simple act of Indigenous people braiding each other's hair *today* (and I mean this between any combination of genders) is an embodied political action[58] – meaning that the embodied practice of braiding each other's hair not only reaffirms our current relationship ties through physically connection and touch, but more importantly, it is the *continuance and rebirth of cultural practices* (despite colonial policies) that demonstrates the strength and resilience rooted in our bodies.

At the time of this writing, Indigenous erotica also includes books such as Akiwenzie-Damm's *Without Reservation: Erotica, Indigenous Style* (2003); Drew Hayden Taylor's *Me Sexy* (2008); Janet Rogers's (Mohawk) *Red Erotic* (2010); and Aboriginal Writers Collective of Manitoba's *xxx ndn* (2011). In December 2003, *Redwire Magazine* dedicated an entire issue to discuss Native sexuality, calling it "Redwire: We are Healing … We are Celebrating

[58] Oskâpew says, "I won't go into any detailed tribal traditions or even Nehiyawe understandings of the meanings of braided hair, as I don't yet have the right to discuss any teachings on the topic. I will say, however, that for many Indigenous peoples, hair (and the braiding of it) holds great spiritual significance."

Our Sexuality," and *Spirit* magazine dedicated their 2008 Annual Literature Issue to the theme of SEX, calling it "Xposed and In Control."

REIMAGININGS

In the genre of Indigenous erotica, Indigenous artists and authors assert their unassailable right to speak for themselves, and for their gender and sexuality. Their erotic expressions evoke our inherent responsibility as Indigenous peoples to reflect continually upon representations of gender and sexuality in our histories and nations and within our "traditions." We must call out and name the impositions of colonial regimes that have sought to suppress and oppress the Indigenous body.

CORPOREAL SOVEREIGNTY

Indigenous erotica expressions are a realm of possibilities, for embracing the erotic can bring us to a place where we can't imagine a time when we felt more loved, more at peace, more ravished, and more desired. Corporeal sovereignty is agency and authority over oneself. We are free to feel, to make choices about our loves, lives, and losses. Indigenous erotica are everyday bodily and emotional sensations. Akiwenzie-Damm goes on to say:

> As writers we are taking our knowledge and experiences as Indigenous peoples from rich and vibrant cultures, as people who have been colonized, stereotyped, violated and abused, and through our erotic stories and poems we are transforming all of that into something affirming, inspiring and beautiful. (118)

KINSHIP

Relationship ties and connections to people and places are critical to understanding the interconnectedness of ourselves to others and to the universe. The term "All My Relations" is a foundational element of many kinship-based Indigenous societies. It expresses the belief that all living things are related and interconnected. The actions of one being can affect everything and everyone around them. In this way, we come to understand

relationships as non-hierarchical; no one is above anyone else. We further understand kinship as unbreakable ties of intergenerational webbing, inextricably connecting us to past generations and generations to come. The Indigenous erotic is a network of relationships, each touching others on all sides. Like Grandmother Spider's web, a single vibrating sensation is felt by everyone – even across great distances.

GENDER

My research uses Indigenous erotica stories, songs, poems, and visual art to demonstrate alternative approaches to how we think about our sexuality and our gender. I am part of "a re-evolution that [will] take us back to our beginnings to reclaim our stories and who we are in a powerful and empowering way" (Akiwenzie-Damm 123). It is the decentring of Western European tropes of masculinity and femininity, the disruption of the dichotomy of female/male, and the addition of a spectrum of genders (the idea that gender is not limited to female and male, but there are other manifestations of gender). Opening up this discussion allows us to express our bodies, our genders, and our sexual identities in the ways in which we choose. These are decolonizing practices in the erotic. Much like my Nehiyaw'iskwew research methods, an eroticanalysis defies conventional expectations, rejecting "the conventionally expected … the merely safe" (Lorde 59). Indigenous erotica reclaims our bodies. It is a source of joy, a place of political action, and a domain in which to assert our sovereignty. Akiwenzie-Damm contends:

> To reclaim and express our sexuality is part of the larger path to decolonization precisely because the concept of sexuality points to a nexus of practices, desires, relations, and pleasures in which one could locate the presence of modes of Indigeneity that exceed the "oppressed, repressed, shamed, and imposed sense of reality" generated through institutionalized processes of settlement. (in Rifkin 2012, 28)

ONGOING COLLECTIVE

The ongoing collective consists of the languages and cultures of our grandmothers, given to us through stories and generational narratives. This ongoing collective is the communal language and memory that is shared in our communities. Erotic narratives like "What to do when your Indian man doesn't take his socks off during sex anymore" by Van Camp goes beyond the tropes of oppression, repression, and shame to celebrate the sexuality and sensuality (and humour) of Indian people. Here are some excerpts:

> Ladies,
>
> I got some bad news.
>
> If your indian man isn't taking his socks off during sex anymore
>
> The. show. is. over.
>
> What to do, you ask?
>
> Remind him that men of all colours have burned down their houses, abandoned their vehicles and quit paying taxes just aching for your body.
>
> And if that doesn't work
>
> tell him about that Inuk I seen in a swinger's magazine who's from Iqaluit.
>
> This thirsty angel will show up at your doorstep with a bottle of barbecue sauce
> and he'll pour it all over your toes
> and he'll slurp it all off too.
>
> He'll make those happy num num sounds like your ol'man used to
>
> When he knew the sweetest canoe was between your legs!
>
> So maybe remind your man that he's not the only bull around
> and it's pretty easy to find that Inuk with a bottle of bbq sauce
>
> or someone like him
>
> just fuckin' starving
>
> for you (1–20)

Van Camp's story repatriates our bodies from colonial imaginings. We recognize the presence of Indigeneity through strategies of language and everyday lived sensations. For

instance, Van Camp's line, "When he knew the sweetest *canoe* was between your legs!" (47) shares a sensual cultural language. The words "sweetest canoe" traces the contours of yoni-inspired[59] female forms with a language saturated in cultural significance. Indigenous visual artists and authors are surging forth in their erotic expressions with deeply rooted symbols of Indigeneity. Culturally significant markers (like canoes for vaginas) remind us that our Indigenous bodies link directly with the land.

Rifkin states that "[r]eciprocally, by making erotics a way of exploring the contours and dynamics of indigeneity, the authors I address foreground interdependence and vulnerability as positive principles of peoplehood" (35). Similarly, I engage with forms of Indigenous erotica that repatriate our bodies and that reject colonial imaginings and representations and reimagine our sexuality and gender from within the realm of the everyday and the sacred.

There are so many meanings of the erotic embedded within these excerpts of Van Camp's poem!
As you read the poem, what were you thinking about?
Did you imagine bbq sauce on *your* toes?
I hope you did … it means you're feeling the erotic! Please re-read this poem and circle the words that stand out for you.
Take time to ruminate on what draws you to these words.

INDIGENOUS EROTICA MAIN TEXTS

The two primary literary characters in my research are the Windigo[60]-killer Niska, and the Kyn warrior Tarsa'Deshae. As chapters three and four demonstrate, the elements of

[59] Oskâpew says, "Yoni is the Sanskrit word for vagina. In both Indigenous erotica exhibits, Indigenous artists used their own culturally relevant items such as oysters, clams, totem poles, and seaweed to imitate and represent vaginas, clitorises, labias, penises, and testicles."
[60] Oskâpew says, "The Northern cultures like the Nehiyawak and Inuit and Anishnaabe (also known as Chippewa and Ojibwa) have strict belief systems that forbid the consumption of human flesh. Crossing this boundary results in a fate worse than death; one becomes a creature called the Windigo. The Windigo has an insatiable hunger for human flesh and can only be cured through beheading and/or burning of the bodies."

Indigenous erotics are present in the distinctive traits of each of these warriors. Several literary and visual works of Indigenous erotica – including the poetry of Chrystos, Harjo, Scofield, Louis Esme Cruz, and Marilyn Dumont; the visual artistry of Odjig, Morrisseau, Kent Monkman (Nehiyawe ancestry), Thirza Cuthand (Nehiyawe), Janet Rogers, and Kinnie Starr; and the curatorial works of Morgan and Martin, Paul Chaat Smith (Comanche), Jones, and Edenshaw – have been integral to my current understanding of Indigenous erotics. Nitataminan; I am so grateful. And now

let's meet Niska, shall we?

CHAPTER THREE – THREE DAY ROAD

A RECAP OF THE MAP

Chapter one explores the concept of a Nehiyaw'iskwew research method that includes embodied knowledges and my practice of an eroticanalysis; chapter two develops this foundation of the erotic with clear definitions and strong examples of the erotic, erotica, Indigenous erotic and Indigenous erotica. Chapters three and four follow an eroticanalysis as well as my Nehiyaw'iskwew research practices of locality, textual resistance, relational accountability, and ceremony. To recap, *locality* seeks to position the author with a tangible subjective voice threaded throughout the text. *Textual resistance* emulates oral storytelling techniques as much as possible, which means the inclusion of sources of visual art, poetry, personal experiences, and excerpts from stories. *Relational accountability* keeps the author and readers keenly aware of the impetus of this research and reminds us that there is a responsibility attendant upon the writing and dissemination of this research. Finally, *ceremony* demonstrates and honours how these practices of medicine people and spiritual power are critical in our everyday lives, including in my analysis and writing. I hope I have stimulated you, reader, and whetted your appetite to learn more about these five elements of Indigenous erotica. Have the sensual examples of Hunt's *Hotbox*, Wabegijig's Coyote and Van Camp's erotic text enticed you to explore these concepts more thoroughly with an eroticanalysis of Niska?

Remember that erotica, in general, is a genre that expresses the written and visual articulations of embodied sensations and pleasures, while Indigenous erotica expands this notion. Indigenous erotica is situated and guided by the principles of "All My Relations" and is a state of awareness in which one embodies and integrates the sensual and pleasures from all aspects of Indigenous life. For example, Indigenous erotica can be found in Indigenous memories, emotions and story. My Nehiyaw'iskwew methodological practices and concepts of Indigenous erotica form a strong literary force to locate and reveal the

ways in which the character Niska embodies elements of erotica, and furthermore, how the Indigenous erotic operates as a tool for decolonization.

REIMAGININGS

Reimagining encompasses acts of nonconformity, resistance, and subversion, and also alternative ways of envisioning the past, present, and future. Writing this thesis within my eroticanalysis practice is a reimagining. Indigenous writers and artists are generating new landscapes, and new possibilities for "Indigenous subjectivity, sociality, and spatiality … a process of creating newness from existing materials, seemingly out of nowhere" (Rifkin 2012, 99). While it may seem that these new possibilities come from "nowhere," there is in fact a rich Indigenous archive from which to draw. These landscapes are part of the collective Indigenous identity stemming from individual and collective experiences of Indigenous people. Reimaginings do not conform to the current logics of settler colonial power; they resist the colonial "managing" of Indians by the Indian Act and avoid impositions of legal definitions of our selves. Reimaginings are also subversive actions taken up by Indigenous authors to disrupt colonial stereotypes. We find this reimagining in Joseph Boyden's *Three Day Road,* where the character Niska's leadership role as a medicine woman resists both the settler colonial stereotypes (squaw or maiden) and imaginings of the "ideal" woman conforming to the heteronormative patriarchy (a man–woman marriage resulting in children).

CORPOREAL SOVEREIGNTY

Corporeal sovereignty conveys agency and authority over oneself. Corporeal sovereignty resides in our ability to express our unique selves — our appearances, spirituality, sexual identities, genders. Having corporeal sovereignty is when, as Driskill argues, we have full control over and access to "tribally specific and traditional understandings of our bodies, sexualities, genders, and erotic senses of self" (51). It is having the freedom to choose without discrimination or violence. Corporeal sovereignty also includes attending to and

honouring the embodied sensations of everyday life. Corporeal sovereignty can be expressed in the smallest of gestures. Take for example, this scene of young Niska's short experience in residential school:

> They were going to remove the black hair that reached to my waist as symbol of wemistikoshiw authority, of our defeat. She sat me in a chair, other nuns hovering in expectation of a fight, but I sat and smiled serenely as she tugged at my hair, pulling it hard to get a reaction from me that wouldn't come. When she was done and my scalp ached, I refused to look in the mirror that they shoved in front of me. I did not want to give them the reaction of shock and sadness that they so wanted. I'd already planned my answer to their action … I cut the rest of my hair from my head so that all that was left was a stubbly field … One of the nuns whispered devil, and knowing better but not being able to help it, I smiled at this word. (93)

I would argue that Niska's forced haircut is anti-erotic. If this is the case, then can her act of "*cut[ting] the rest of my hair from my head so that all that was left was a stubbly field"* be erotic? Yes. To me, Niska's sovereign act is absolutely erotic, and here is why: Niska gains sovereignty over her body by wresting power away from the nuns in the midst of their violent assault. For Niska, the erotic practice comes from her agency, her control over her body through the Nehiyawe cultural practice of cutting her hair in mourning. This action relates to the video "Put The Lights On" in the *RezErect* exhibit. The sensual video of two Indigenous people braiding each other's long hair relates to Niska cutting her hair to stubble, as both the hair cutting and braiding actions signal deeply meaningful Indigenous cultural traditions. Niska reenacts the culturally imbued actions of cutting her hair and affirms the erotic by engaging in a customary practice that embodies a cultural continuance within the ongoing collective.

As well, young Niska signals her agency even within this violent environment of oppression when she refuses to react to the forced haircut in the expected manner. During

the hair-cutting ritual, she smiles. Her defiant, smile along with her shaved head, demonstrate Niska's authority over her own body; she resists the nuns with a simple but powerful expression of embodied agency.

KINSHIP

Indigenous erotics manifests itself within the element of kinship, and illustrates the interrelatedness of beings and their unique relationships with each other and with the land (place). Kinship, in this sense, may represent the bond between two or more people who are not related by blood, but are spiritually connected through shared experiences; the breadth of kinship rarely has limitations. While the modern family model in Canada has changed considerably, often the "nuclear family" is recognized as consisting of two parents (male and female) and their children. Nehiyawak forms of kinship have a much broader understanding of family. For example, sisters of your mother are not aunts, but are mothers to you.

The language of Nehiyawewin reflects this.
The word for aunt, nikawis,
literally translates to "little mother."
You may recall that mother is nikawiy
adding "sis" (a diminutive indicator) to nikawiy
makes it nikawis (you drop the first "s").
Little mother.

nikawiy Carol Bear

nikawis Beverly Bear

nikawis Audrey O'Connor

Likewise, your father's brother would be recognized as your second father. Extended relationships ensured that children had the care, love, and teachings of many adults. In the following scene, the Indigenous concept of kinship is illustrated. Niska is listening to the

conversation between her nephew, Xavier, and his friend Elijah (both twelve or thirteen years old at the time):

> "Why does she call you Nephew and not your real name?" he asked. "Nephew is my real name," you answered. "I am her nephew."
>
> "Does she ever call you by our Christian name?" he asked.
>
> You shook your head, looked at me nervously. "My name is Nephew." (288)

Nehiyawe concepts of kinship are reflected in the way that Niska refers to Xavier. They express their relationship and how they are related by the name she calls him: "Nephew." Similarly, my grandma, aunties, and uncles call me "my girl." My daughters are called the same, and my son, "my boy." Even now, I smile and my eyes fill with happy tears when I remember the first time we introduced our four-year old son to the rest of the family, and my mom said, "We've been waiting a long time to meet you, my boy." When I hear my 76-year old auntie call my 51-year old cousin "my boy," my heart sings. So why does the phrase "my boy" even include me? In my Nehiyaw'iskwew experience, at powwows, ceremony or other gatherings, I hear other Indigenous families using the same loving terms whether they are Anishnaabek, Métis, or Nehiyawe. The phrase "my boy" includes me because when I hear it in my family or someone else's family, I feel a sense of comfort, like there is an ageless secret between me and other Indigenous people. A knowing. It gives me a sense of belonging to my kin (of course) but also a closeness to an invisible network larger than just me and my family. It negates the feeling I had when the Elder walked away from me in the story "Tante Ohci Kiya?" Terminology like "my girl" becomes part of the network in which Leanne Simpson notes "the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual attachment flows through our bodies and joins us to our home and our overlapping algorithmic networked system of intelligence" (L. Simpson). The "networked system of intelligence" includes kinship terms, so although Xavier does not call Niska "mother," *she* continues the cultural practice and calls him "nephew." This one simple word affirms their

aunt/nephew bond and also acknowledges their ancestral rootedness within their Nehiyawe worlds. Kinship terms like "nephew" and "my girl" are small but significant connective tissues that reflect and extend Indigenous understandings of family, respect, love, and care.

GENDER

The concept of gender in the Indigenous erotic includes possibilities of multiple genders in all their expressions and manifestations. and thus I use the word "genderful". The resistant nature of the erotic defies and subverts colonial heteronormative notions of gender and sexuality and challenges concepts we deem to be the natural order of things. Disrupting the normative, Niska does not comply with Western European tropes of femininity and masculinity or the roles and responsibilities that come with these labels. Embracing gender variability operates as a vehicle with which to imagine new Indigenous paradigms. In some ways, Niska does fit the expected gender norm in that she is biologically female and has sexual intercourse with men; however, she does not fit neatly into colonially subscribed gender roles and responsibilities.

I want to spend a little time on a brief, somewhat troubling passage. The first line articulates the derision Niska faces as a *woman* living alone: "Long past my father's death I remember how they laughed at me, a woman living alone in the bush and trapping animals" (48). For me, at first, this line felt slightly out of character in Boyden's overall portrayal of Niska. I realize that for any Nehiyawe (whether male, female, or genderful), living alone during the time at which the novel is set came at great risk,[61] yet Boyden indicates that Niska is laughed at in part specifically because she is a woman: "[T]hey laughed at me, a woman living alone in the bush" (48). It didn't make sense that, even after Niska had overcome great adversity, and with her position as a medicine woman, other characters saw Niska's femaleness as *the* problem with her living alone. At first, the misogyny did not make

[61] Oskâpew says, "Further along in this chapter, I elaborate on the element of kinship and the dangers of a solitary existence, using the storyline of Micah and his wife and son."

any sense to me. However, I reflected upon the next line – "after all my relations had gone to the reserves" (48) – and I began to think about the colonial forces involved at this particular point in history, the years of 1914–1919 (surrounding WWI). During the time Niska's relatives had been forced to settle onto reserves,[62] settler colonial heteropatriarchy infiltrated the lives of Indigenous people. Attitudes towards Indigenous women had changed in Indigenous communities. I understand the use of the word "they" in "they laughed at me, a woman living alone in the bush" (48) to describe Niska's people. Settlers' prevailing misogynistic attitudes towards women infiltrated Niska's people, and with the exception of the awawatuk,[63] other Indigenous people would see any woman living alone, even a powerful medicine woman like Niska, as an outcast.

Like the solitary male hunters, Niska lived in relative isolation, with the exception of the occasion visitor who sought answers from the spirit world:

> The awawatuk accepted that I was the natural extension of my father, the new limb through which my family's power travelled. By the time I was living in my seventeenth winter, men would come to me not for what men usually seek women for, but to ask questions and advice. (131)

The line, "men would come to me not for what men usually seek women for" indicates that the gender norm would be for men to seek out women for sex. In this example, the responsibility Niska holds is a spiritual one and bypasses the expected code of behaviour and actions for a woman (consensual sex for pleasure and procreation). Reader, do you recall the Gondola story? I remind you of my experience to reveal something important here. I've already established that the legacy of social and structural violence caused by the historical denigration of Indigenous women has resulted in widespread sexual violence

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[62] Oskâpew says, "The setting for *Three Day Road* was in Northern Ontario, Treaty 9 territory. This treaty was originally signed in 1909, but had many adhesions (bands who decided to sign after the original signing) up until 1925."

[63] Oskâpew says, "Awawatuk means 'old hunters.'"

against Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. Further, I see the snowboarder's (I think of him simply as "Snowboarder") rejection by an Indigenous woman in the Gondola story, and his subsequent racist rant, as an exposure to the insidiousness of gendered and racial violence. With all the benefits and privileges of being a white cis male, Snowboarder was shocked that the Indigenous woman did not follow an *expected (and desired) code of behaviour* that he defined. The connection of this particular text to Niska demonstrates how expectations of gender and race are a result of societal programming and construction – and, in the case of Indigenous women, this stems from a historical geography of racialized sexual violence. Snowboarder's rant revealed a thinly veiled rage and potential for violence when an Indigenous woman refused to accede to his/his society's expectations – in this case, a white cis male's assumptions about easy access to sex. In acknowledging Niska's position as a medicine woman and others' expectations of her, Boyden places Indigenous women's bodies in a sovereign position with the line "*men would come to me not for what men usually seek women for.*" Niska's body (whether male, female, or genderful) has a responsibility and obligation to her people due to her shamanic gifts. But, her Indigenous female body does not require a sexual indebtedness. Sex (with some expectations to give/receive pleasure and to procreate) remains consensual, and there is no obligation tied to the act. However, Niska's gift has responsibilities embedded within the tribal ethos of reciprocity. Boyden's characterization of Niska provides an alternative code of behavior and reminds us that tribal obligations result from each person's skills, experience, and gifts, which do not necessarily depend upon their gender.

ONGOING COLLECTIVE

The ongoing collective is the expression of Indigenous language and culture, through generational narratives, stories, and memory. Indigenous peoples can access stories of the erotic through tribal knowledges, contemporary realities, and personal experiences. Rifkin

relies upon Miranda's article "Dildos, Hummingbirds, and Driving Her Crazy" to show how these avenues have become a guide to use as sources of renewal and inspiration:

> Fantasy and desire provide a way for Miranda to address the connection between feeling, embodiment, and action, the dialectic through which the ephemeral becomes material and vice versa, thereby opening up alternative possibilities for what may count as real. (Rifkin 2012, 99)

This next scene reveals how Niska attempts to heal her nephew through the erotic. Her "ephemeral" memories are the medicinal resources she uses to recover and renew Nephew's health. She recalls:

> I remember when I was a child and came to my father scared or hurt I remember what he would do to help me. He made stories for me. About me. About how he imagined me before I was ever even born. I have no medicine that will help Nephew, but in these memories, I find something. (354)

We see the invocation of the ongoing collective knowledge handed down to her by her father through the use of stories. There is healing and renewal in the telling of these stories. These concepts are decolonizing. They decolonize the truth.

The ability to communicate through the erotic is a powerful force, and has the capacity to share the whole of the human being – the physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual. The proof of the power of stories, intrepid reader, lies within the memories of your family and mine. In the same way that the terms "my girl" and "Nephew" function, stories about me (and you) are woven into our larger ancestral collective of memories. These storied memories link us to our families (and for me, extend to my Nehiyawe Nation). At *every* family gathering – at which I must be present for the tale to be told – my cousin recalls a humorous story about the "shit he got" (that is, the punishment he received) from our grandma when he pulled a chair out from under me at dinner. According to him, I cried and

was unnecessarily dramatic – I was 10 and he was 15 years old at the time. As my grandma held and comforted my bawling self (as his story goes), I peeked over her shoulder at my cousin and gave a wink and a smile through my "crocodile" tears. While I won't go into the inconsistencies of his story, my question is this: Why are these personal stories so undeniably delightful and captivating to us? Without fail, the preferred stories of my children, my nephews and nieces include themselves and their families. While I won't deny the narcissistic tendencies of children (or myself for that matter), these memories are medicine, designed to create, recall, and deepen the ties among us.[64] How do Niska's stories act as medicine for Nephew? To answer, let me tell you what I know about my family. No matter how many times my cousin tells the "crocodile tears" story or my family members relate teasing/funny stories or reminiscence about loved ones, they all serve the same purpose. Every story affirms our belonging to each other, establishes and recognizes our shared history and our kinship bonds. But as I explained earlier, when my cousin is called "my boy," the stories don't always need to include me; I receive the same affirmation of belonging. Stories about our loved ones nurture and strengthen the connective tissue among us, as much as they confirm and validate our own existence and place. So without "*medicine that will help Nephew*" (354), Niska wields her stories as medicine to keep Nephew with her, to keep him from dying. In this way, her memories act as medicine and remind him of his kinship ties and his place.

SCENE ONE – THE PROVOCATION OF NISKA: CHURCH SCENE

There are several significant concepts of the Indigenous erotic portrayed in the complex relationship between Niska and a wemistikoshiw trapper[65]. These passages begin with Niska

[64] Oskâpew says, "I recognize not all family stories are happy memories. I acknowledge that for many, their family stories involve pain, grief, shame and rage – I have those too. There is extensive and important research that reveals how unresolved and unsettled trauma can fester and actualize itself within the body (see the work of LeManuel Bitsoi [Navajo], Research Associate in Genetics at Harvard University, and Native researcher Teresa Brockie, PhD, among others); however, this is not within the scope of my research."

[65] Oskâpew says, "The word, wemistikoshiw means a white person."

telling stories of her past to her nephew as she paddles him home in her canoe. I hope to demonstrate that these stories are not merely trivial reminiscences, but memories used as medicine to save Nephew's life. While it may seem logical to begin with the scenes of Niska and the trapper's first meetings, I choose to begin my analysis with the following scene of sexual and spiritual violence that occurs after they have known each other for several seasons. So, intrepid reader, I share this powerful scene, as it stands as a disquieting reminder of the continued sexual violence against Indigenous women, girls, and genderful people and

returns to the intention behind the focus of my thesis

Miranda's words remind me of the importance of fighting for the erotic when she says, "In other words, we cannot be allowed to *see* indigenous women in all their erotic glory without also *seeing* and acknowledging all that has been done to make those women – their bodies and cultures – extinct" (145). The war that the settler state declared on Indigenous women's bodies is not over. Niska serves as a symbolic body for Indigenous women. Let us recall the words of Audra Simpson, who connects the dispossession of Indigenous land to the ongoing slaughter of Indigenous women as she speaks about the hunger strike of Chief Theresa Spence.[66] Simpson asserts that "Canada is a settler society that seeks an ongoing settling of land; even more so, it is killing our women to dispossess us of our land" (keynote). The trapper, like the settler regimes, views these bodies as locations to be controlled and possessed by the settler state. As property, then, these bodies can be raped, tortured, killed, and disposed of without consequence. Niska also serves as a reminder of the power that my sisters and I have as Indigenous women – the power that comes from embracing the erotic.

[66] Oskâpew says, "In December 2012, Chief Theresa Spence resolved to fast until then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Gov. Gen David Johnson agreed to meet with her and discuss the crisis of housing and social conditions in her community, Attawapiskat."

Do not worry if this eroticanalysis is not entirely chronological, reader; we will return to Niska and the trapper's initial meeting soon enough. For now, let me set the scene: Niska, a young Nehiyaw'iskwew living on her own, encounters a white trapper as he ventures into the deep wilderness and into her territory. Over the course of several months of playing cat-and-mouse (or huntress and hunted), Niska finally allows him to "find" her camp, where they have consensual and mutually pleasurable sex. When the trapper fails to turn up in her territory for a few months, Niska, curious about his absence, travels to the nearest fort to look for him. She finally finds him drinking in a bar, and at his insistence, Niska has her first taste of alcohol. Several hours later, Niska feels disorientated and sick after several shots of liquor, and the trapper takes her to a church. Please note, intrepid reader, that this scene is disturbing and violent. Remember Miranda's words? Also, may I remind you that, while *Three Day Road* is a work of fiction, the everyday occurrence of sexual violence against Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk is not.

kiskinowasihta

Our discomfort gives us the opportunity
to *recognize* and *reflect* on our privileged spaces.

He took my hand and led me toward the church. When I realized he wanted to take me inside, I struggled against him. "Mo-na, (no)" I said. "Don't take me in there."

"It is safe here," he said. "It is a holy place. A place to talk to the Father." I followed him as he pushed open the big door, then shut it behind him. The smell was everywhere in here, like cedar, but too strong. He walked straight down the aisle, and I could do nothing but follow, running a hand down one row of benches as I went, letting them steady me. He stopped by the table in front of all the benches. It stood on a small rise of wood.

"This is where a man takes a woman to be his forever," he said to me, pulling me to him and kissing me.

I began to wonder how well I felt as he kissed me, but pushed the thought aside and let my tongue touch his.

"This is a good place, a holy place," he whispered, biting at my ear. "You are a holy Indian, no?" he whispered. "The other Indians say you are very holy, very strong."

His lean body pushed against me. I could feel his hardness. I did not answer him but kissed him back instead. "You want me for you?" I asked as best I could in his tongue. He smiled and nodded. "Here is the place?" I asked, looking at him. He smiled and nodded again. I kissed him. "Us?" I asked.

He smiled and picked me up, sat me on the table. He pulled my cotton dress up so that I was exposed to him, then lowered his head and kissed me there with his tongue. I held his hair in my hands, and when I could not take it any longer I pulled his mouth up to mine and kissed him deep. His hands struggled with his belt, and then I felt him thrust in me until I called out. He panted and we rocked and then I felt him tense inside of me too fast, too soon. I wrapped my legs around him so that he would stay inside a little longer. Finally, he pulled out of me, and I stretched out on the table, looking up at him, my head spinning.

He laughed. "I fucked you in a church," he said, and smiled. I smiled back at him. "I fucked the heathen Indian out of you in this church," he said, but this time the smile was not happy. "I took your ahcahk,[67]" he said to me, the smile gone now. "Do you understand? I fucked your ahcahk, your spirit. Do you understand that?" He stared down at me, his eyes wide with a look that made my stomach feel ill. I pushed him away with my legs and covered myself up.

[67] Oskâpew says, "Ahcahk means 'spirit' in Nehiyawewin."

> It's too late," he said. "You are nothing special, just another squaw whore. I took your power away in this place and sent it to burn in hell where it belongs." (173–174)

Reader, you may have read this passage several times already. But please, take a moment to feel the viciousness and hate in the last two sentences. I want you and me to sit with this scene for a moment. Breathe in for two counts, relax your shoulders and breathe out for four counts.

If the following eroticanalysis of the church scene were a sweat lodge, I would warn you that we are beginning a very hot and very uncomfortable round. The sweat lodge holder would tell you to pray harder and sing louder. I only ask that you not let your mind wander, and you not look away. Focus and be mindful of what I am about to tell you. **Kiskinowasihta**.

I want to tell you why I begin with this grim but significant scene from *Three Day Road* – a scene that operates on two distinct levels. On the first and most obvious level, this passage with Niska and the white trapper serves as a provocative reminder of the history of sexual violence committed by the colonizer upon Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. The second aspect explores Niska's gifts as elements of the erotic; her strength and power in ceremonies (shaking tent, divination) and the power of her hereditary gifts as a Windigo killer are embodiments of Indigenous erotics.

As an Indigenous woman living in Canada, I reside in a perpetual state of war. I've known this since I was five years old. In kindergarten I learned how to read and learned about the cold realities of racism. It is no wonder I begin every day by mentally securing protective armour on my body and carrying a substantial sword on my back. You won't see my sword, wondering reader, but you will notice that I stand straight and proud because of it. My armour is strong, forged in the hottest fires of racism and discrimination; my sword is

sharpened to a fine edge by the knowledge I've received from Elders and my post-secondary education. I feel a sense of security with these protective armaments against my almost-everyday encounters that range from outright prejudice to ignorant racist remarks. But most Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk are currently without sanctuary and weapons to defend themselves. So,

as I write this, and as you read these words,

Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk endure (and fiercely resist) sexual, emotional, and spiritual violence founded on processes of domination and extermination.

as I write this, and as you read these words,

non-indigenous Canadians reap benefits from the land and rich resources that *require(d)* the murder and subjugation of the First Peoples of this land.[68]

as I write this, and as you read these words,

what are you feeling?

It was never my intention to start the chapter this way, beginning with the eroticanalysis of a scene that seemingly offers nothing but degradation and violence. Reader, don't feel betrayed. I realize that in previous chapters I promised to present narratives that ignore or bypass tropes of victimization. I hope you come to understand what compels me. During the first drafting of this chapter in June 2014, I learned of a sickening, cowardly attack on a Nehiyaw'iskwew, Marlene Bird from Montreal Lake First Nation. Dumped in a parking lot in Prince Albert, Marlene was found sexually assaulted and badly beaten, her face sliced and torn down the middle. Burned to the bone, both her legs were eventually amputated. As I read the media reports, the words of Boyden's white trapper, the wemistikoshiw, echoed in

[68] Oskâpew says, "If you need recent proof, check out the November 2015 *Indian Country* article on the controversial billboard erected in Killiam, Alberta. It depicts a dark-haired women lying naked on her back; flames surround her while a large pile driver bores into her body (a pile driver is a drilling machine used in the oilfields). The billboard contains the words, 'Screwpiles, We Drill Them to Hell and Back.'" http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/11/24/drill-them-hell-and-back-billboard-be-changed-face-outrage-162533

my mind: "You're nothing special, just another squaw whore. I took your power away in this place and sent it to burn in hell where it belongs" (174). Marlene and I come from the same reserve, you know, reader. I haven't met her yet, but my auntie tells me that our Bear family is related to her Bird family.

Then, in August, I learned about two horrific deaths of Indigenous women. The body of Tina Fontaine (Nehiyaw'iskwew from Sagkeeng First Nation) was found in a hockey bag in the Red River in downtown Winnipeg. Tina was 15 years old. Then the remains of Pamela Napoleon's (Dane-zaa Blueberry River First Nations), who had been missing since July 23, 2014, were positively identified in a burnt cabin near Fort St. John. Pamela was 42. Police suspect foul play in both cases.

> *Pamela and Tina, I acknowledge you here, my sisters. I pray that you have found peace with our ancestors. I send up sweet sage in my prayers for you, Marlene. My three sisters, I pray for your families and for them to have the strength to find peace.*

The same day, Canadian media headlines crowed that Canada was regarded as one of the best countries to live in in the world, due (ironically) to "lower murder rates" and "wide diversity acceptance." Not counting the one-thousand, one-hundred and eighty-one[69] murdered or missing Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk, plus two more. And counting (RCMP 3).

The scene with Niska and the real-life brutality against three of my Indigenous sisters clearly demonstrate how the violation of the erotic "leaves us vulnerable to oppression, subjugation and victimization" (Lorde 62). As Indigenous peoples, we have had our erotic selves oppressed, and our belief systems on diverse sexualities and genders continue to be distorted to reflect the colonizers' patriarchal concepts and codes. There is an old saying –

[69]Oskâpew says, "These stats come from a 2014 RCMP report that states that there is a total of 1,181 missing and murdered Aboriginal women; it is found here: http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/mmaw-faapd-eng.htm."

do you know it, reader? *The past often informs the future.* If this is true, what is the future for our Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk, and, by extension, our communities? More marginalization, brutalization and murder? Unequivocally, the genocidal policies and ongoing marginalization by the colonizer is the number-one reason for the sexual violence against and murders of Indigenous women. Driskill invokes queer activist and poet Chrystos, who writes:

> Because sex has been split off from us as women in a colonizer culture, we ourselves police our pleasure.… We need to engage in a radical discussion & redefinition of our sexuality, a discussion which has been co-opted to issues of biology (abortion and conception), rather than sexual freedom, remembering that freedom needs the bones of responsibility to flourish. (83)

Boyden's church scene provides opportunities for you and me, reader, to contemplate and imagine. I want us to consider how 1) Niska's powerful gift of divination and seeing the future signifies the erotic; 2) Niska's body symbolizes the removal of Indigenous bodies from Indigenous homelands; and 3) the church represents the colonial state and the Christian religious institutions that enacted specific strategies of genocide to expedite the removal of Indigenous bodies from their homelands.

To do this, let us get back to the text again. Prior to the church scene, Niska travels to Moose Factory to find the trapper. Months earlier, he had left her camp angrily after she was approached by an old hunter to divine for him so his family would be successful in hunting (166). When Niska told the trapper to leave,

> [h]e didn't put up a fight, but packed his things. Although he could not understand what the old man requested of me, he suddenly understood that I was not simply a young woman living in the bush alone. I live alone for a reason. I had a gift that

> others wanted and needed. I was frightened by how sullen this made him, how he stopped speaking to me. He left the lodge, leaving only the sting of his anger. (166)

When Niska eventually seeks out the absent trapper at Moose Factory and finds him in a bar, she is not without agency when she thinks, "I would take him back to the bush and keep him there, change him so that he no longer desired this place of humans" (171). Although the trapper is surprised at her presence (at first sight believing she was just another Cree woman he might seduce), he recovers his composure quickly.

I imagine Niska's prowess as a hunter complements her ability to read body language. She interprets the trapper quickly and clearly – and catches two moments: the flash of delight in his face at the prospect of a new potential conquest, quickly followed by his recognition of Niska. Then she realizes, "Everything the old woman had said about him was true" (171) and that he had "a taste for red meat that he can't satisfy. There are little half-French, half-Indian children running around this place that he refuses to claim" (169). At this realization, that she is merely "red meat," Niska pushes the trapper away. The next line, "A flash of anger sparked his eyes for only a second, then something else that I could not read" (171), reveals two things. The first is that Niska isn't just one of the many Indian women the trapper can use and discard; she has power. The "flash of anger" (171) in his eyes is an extension of his harboured rage at their last parting.

Second, let us recall the Snowboarder (yes, him again): he carried rage for Indigenous women. But I see the example of the trapper as manifesting a different kind of fury. The trapper's rage illustrates a deeply embedded fear of Indigenous women – a *fear of the erotic power* that they hold. This erotic power is established through their connection to the land, extended kinship networks, and the concept of "All My Relations." As Miranda relates, the erotic is feared by settlers because it exposes obstacles to their continued colonization of the land. I've claimed that Indigenous women's bodies are inscribed with notions of land; and scholars such as Leanne Simpson, Audra Simpson, Miranda, Andrea Smith, and Janice

Acoose (Anishinaabekwe, Métis, Nehiyawe) have also argued that the need to subjugate and colonize the land relies upon the subjugation of Indigenous women. Miranda states that this revelation is dangerous in that it has the power to destroy the mythology of democracy and freedoms of the colonial power:

> … [the erotic] threatens to reveal heinous crimes and equally horrific cover-ups, revelations that attach the most vulnerable point in American identity – the jarring intersection of a democratic "nation" and genocide. (145)

The rage stems from the fear that Indigenous women's bodies carry the truth of the brutal foundation of the democratic nation of Canada. In this way, I observe the trapper acting as an actor/steward for the state, bent on the eradication or assimilation of Indigenous women and of our erotic. Lorde emphasizes, "Women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas of our lives other than sex" (55). Niska's erotic is not consigned to the realm of sex; her erotic extends to every aspect of her life. The trapper (as the "state") sees Niska (representing Indigenous women), thus empowered, as dangerous. Can we forge armour and weapons from the erotic?

Returning to the text, and to further address my second point, the trapper's quick recovery from his fury – "anger sparked his eyes for only a second" (171) – hints at the dangerous motivations behind his sudden acceptance of the situation. The last part of the sentences says, "then something else that I could not read" (171). Although Niska is unable to intuit the trapper's thoughts here, she still senses a darkness that then foreshadows an action yet to come. This moment, this "something else," is the turning point for Niska and the trapper. Realizing his advantage while Niska is in unfamiliar territory, his strategy to render her powerless begins with alcohol. Unused to liquor, Niska drinks the "yellow liquid" (171), her head begins to spin and she finds that her "legs felt like a new calf's, loose and

long under me so that I had to grab the door frame as I passed through it" (172). The liquor clouds her mind, weakening her power as she becomes detached from her true emotions, disconnecting her from the erotic. The erotic is not just embodying in our actions or emotions, but includes how fully we can feel in the doing or feeling.[70] Full of liquor, Niska stumbles along disembodied from the erotic, and in this state, she is weak. Niska knows full well how alcohol affects people; she has seen the yellow liquid work on many of her people: "I knew what it was he offered, but I didn't care. I could no longer bear the weight of the last days, and in that first sip realized that this might be a way to let them sit someplace else for a little while" (171–172).

In this part of the passage, Niska succumbs to the temptation to forget, to forget how the homeguard[71] Indians and whites of Moose Factory stared at her, and let these bad memories "sit someplace else for a little while" (172). At this part in the text, I contemplate the relationship between substance abuse and Indigenous peoples. The trapper's so-called "seduction" reminds me of how the colonial state used alcohol and disease as strategies of genocide. Disease spread across Turtle Island with the coming of the first explorers. Estimates of pre-contact populations vary considerably and range between 1 million and 18 million people (Thornton 20), but no matter the actual number, most agree that Indigenous populations were reduced by half. While diseases like tuberculosis, measles, chicken pox, mumps, whooping cough, and influenza ravaged the Indigenous populations, the introduction to alcohol was almost as devastating. The strategy of offering liquor to Aboriginal people prior to trading and negotiating is well-documented and gave Europeans unparallelled advantage. The unfamiliar territory of alcohol gives the trapper an advantage over Niska as well. As my exploration of the church scene plays out, I want you, reader, to

[70] Oskâpew says, "Audre Lorde argues that '[p]ornography emphasizes sensation without true feeling' (570); for Niska, the excess alcohol inhibits her from expressing or having true feelings in this situation."
[71] "Oskâpew says, "Homeguard Indian is an expression that describes the Indians who had left their traditional territories and larger groups and lived close to the trading forts. It is often used as a derogatory term."

keep thinking of the trapper, Niska and the church as representations of specific communities and institutions. The trapper leads Niska (an embodiment of Indigenous children) to the church (a representation of residential schools), and she refuses to enter. "'Mo-na, (no)' I said. 'Don't take me in there'" (173), but the trapper (church) promises her (its) safety, and assures her that it is a sacred place and spiritual place: "'It is safe here,' he said. 'It is a holy place. A place to talk to the Father.'" But he lies; it is not a safe place, not for Niska or the children she represents.

The trapper recognizes Niska's power: "'You are a holy Indian, no?' he whispered. 'The other Indians say you are very holy, very strong'" (173*).* The trapper knows he is vulnerable and cannot control Niska when she roams her ancestral lands. Her connection with the land is her strength, and the removal of her body from the land results in a loss of this strength. Similarly, the Canadian state understood that the removal of Indians from their homelands and onto reserves would allow for governmental control over them. Residential schools were machines of dispossession, removing children not only from their homelands, but also from the influence of their families. For many, churches like the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican and United symbolize a place of love, faith, and worship; they carry messages of love, kindness, generosity and caring. However, as the horrific experiences of many survivors of residential school demonstrate, for many Aboriginal people, church offered none of these things. Residential schools were created, as Superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott is so famously cited, "to kill the Indian in the child" (TRC website). The killing of the Indian happened literally as much as it did metaphorically. In a 1907 report from Dr. Peter Bryce, former Medical Inspector for the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), to Duncan Campbell Scott, Bryce revealed that residential schools had a mortality rate ranging from 30 percent to 50 percent (Baskin 374). Killing the metaphorical Indian in the child left Indigenous communities with an aftermath of intergenerational trauma and

disembodiment from culture, ceremony, kinship, language, and land, and thus from their own bodies and their erotic connections to the world.

The trapper (the church) needs to dispossess Niska (the children) of her (their) homelands to control her (their) body(ies), effectively controlling the land for colonial settlement and resource and economic development. Residential schools disembodied Indigenous children from their cultures and traditions while simultaneously clearing millions of acres of "surplus" land for settlement and development. The shift of Niska's body from her territory also parallels the brutal histories of Indian removal acts and the creation of reservations. This removal is seen across Turtle Island as Indians were pushed from their traditional territories and relegated to small reservations. Referencing his own Cherokee historical trauma and the Indian Removal Act of 1830, known later as the "Trail of Tears," Contemporary Cherokee scholar, Driskill makes this connection to the erotic: "[o]ur erotic lives and identities have been colonized along with our homelands" (31). Niska's body in the church embodies that crucial relationship "between bodies – and their sensory and affective capacities – and 'homelands'" (Rifkin 2012, 31). In this scene, we understand that Niska has been removed from her ancestral homelands. Once in the church, Niska is led to the altar, and the trapper tells her, "'This is where a man takes a woman to be his forever,' he said to me, pulling me to him and kissing me" (173). Interestingly, the words "to be his forever" suggest that the trapper is proposing marriage to Niska. Of course he is not, but he thinks his promises of "forever" will tempt her to have sex with him on the altar, thereby taking away her power.

English words form on Niska's tongue and she whispers three questions" "'You want me for you?' I asked as best I could in his tongue," and "'Here is the place?'" ending with, "'Us?'" (173). Here, in my reading, Niska takes the trapper's words as an offer to continue their consensual (and pleasurable) sexual relationship and not as a promise of marriage. The trapper believes that the promise of marriage is what lures Niska into the church, but pair

bonding for Nehiyawewak did not include formal wedding vows in a church. Niska accepts the trapper's offer, and they proceed to have brief but rigorous sex on the altar. After the sex is over, he stands over her, feeling victorious: "'I took your power away in this place and sent it to burn in hell where it belongs'" (174). For the trapper, this violent act against Niska has "killed the Indian in the child" and has also proven that his god is more powerful and righteous than hers. Niska runs out of the church and heads to the river. As she sobs, she is gripped with fear about what the trapper has done to her: "afraid that his magic had killed my family's fire inside of me, and it was only then that I realized he was a spell-caster of some kind and he'd stolen my strength" (174). The "spell-casting" of the trapper that "steals strength" and "kills the fire of family" mirrors church- and state-sanctioned propaganda (backed up by legal and violent enforcement) designed to indoctrinate Indian children with a sense of inferiority, powerlessness, and shame. For a brief moment, Niska thinks this brutal act has weakened her, that "his magic" had destroyed her power, her erotic. Similar to many residential school survivors and the generations around them, Niska's body and spirit have been violated, but do not die.

I hope you follow the next couple of passages closely, courageous reader.
We have discussed the sweat lodge a few times, correct?
Do you remember that I told you the church scene
would be the most uncomfortable – the hottest round of the sweat?
The sweat is almost over and we are singing the last song of the ceremony now.
Sing loud.
Kiskinowasihta.

Niska strips herself naked, removing the clothes that hold the "stink of their tobacco and drink … especially of him" (174), and runs along the riverbank back to her camp and her canoe. Without delay she paddles back home with "[t]he fear that he really had taken my power from me.…" On the river she begins to reconnect with the land and finds her power once again. Waking the next morning, Niska constructs a sweat lodge, and inside she forges a heat so strong that she thinks her "lungs [will] catch fire" (175). I know intimately of the fire that she talks about; reader, have you ever felt like your lungs were on fire? For me, it

is, as Boyden suggests, a fine line separating pleasure and agony: "pain becomes ecstasy" (175). I am given a glimpse of how brutal the world can be – "pain" – but also pleasure as well; indeed, "ecstasy." Through this sweat, not only am I/are we cleansed, but I/we can see, as Niska does, "the world around me a fresh and clean place again" (175)

Finally, as her ceremony draws to a close, Niska prays: "I prayed harder for purification until the pain became ecstasy, and when I completed the last round I crawled out of the lodge and collapsed on the cool ground, the world around me a fresh and clean place again" (175). I love these passages; they are such a profound embodiment of eroticanalysis. Niska's experience with the trapper in the church and her ensuing purification ceremony in the sweat lodge correspond with *our* embodied journey *here* in the text. I realize our recent conversation hasn't been easy.

pain.

You may think that for a thesis suggesting the use of the Indigenous erotic as a method for decolonization, much of this eroticanalysis of Niska isn't all that erotic. It makes you

uncomfortable.

May I remind you, intrepid reader, that you and I enjoy various levels of privilege. Also, I invoke the words of Simpson and Miranda to remind you, again, that as Canadians, you (and/or people you love) continue to enjoy the benefits that come directly from the dispossession of Indigenous people from their homelands, and the exploitation of resources taken from those lands. Canadians are silent/impotent/blind/indifferent as the state continues to sacrifice Indigenous bodies in order to settle and exploit Indigenous homelands. Not easy words to hear. But, reader, it is necessary – kiskinowasihta – to listen (if not embody) the hurt, the pain and the ugly truths before "the world around [us becomes] a fresh and clean place again' (175).

ecstasy?
not for you, reader, not yet.

For Niska the ceremonies are not over; frustrated, she still hears "the Frenchman's voice in my head, my fear and anger came back to me so that I needed to prove to myself that I still had power" (175). So Niska builds a shaking tent and begins to pray. 'It did not take long for the spirits to come to me. My tent filled with a light as if a thousand fireflies had entered it" (175). Niska's return to the shaking tent represents the final stage of reawakening the erotic. Her powers are revealed as she heals herself with a consummate expression of sensation and passion, the "light … [of] a thousand fireflies"; she is empowered through ceremony. Niska's body symbolizes the land, a place to gain strength and a sense of healing. Rifkin describes this thus: "The body surrogates for (traditional) land(s), and though the one cannot replace the other, the body is cast as a space of nurturance that facilitates persistence amid devastation" (2012, 62). Niska's body, while not defined through the biological role of motherhood, still has responsibility to care for and nurture others. Her body, although a repository of memories of past violence, recovers. Her recovery allows her to nurture and care for her nephew in the future. She tells this same story about the trapper to her nephew as they travel down the river. Her nephew is the symbol of the future. As I have already indicated in our discussion of family stories (remember my so-called crocodile tears?), the telling of Niska's trapper experience to Nephew imparts more than just a story for his survival. She adds another piece to ongoing tribal history and memory; this is the element of the ongoing collective in Indigenous erotics. Rifkin stresses that what also emerges is "the capacity for a kind of speaking that could testify to continuity across the catastrophe of removal and associated forms of ongoing assault and assimilation" (2012, 63). Extending Rifkin's argument, I posit that Niska's story is a testament to Indigenous women's continued survival and resiliency. The "catastrophe" and "assault" correspond to Niska's experience with the trapper at the church, and her recall of her story to Nephew demonstrates kinship and tribal continuance.

Just as the trapper needed the church as a disempowering mechanism to take Niska's power, the Canadian state needed the church. The church acted as a weapon of mass destruction against the corporeal sovereignty of Indigenous people. The church scene is a strong place to reflect on how church- and state-sanctioned genocide aimed to destroy the power of the erotic held by Indigenous peoples. Despite the brutality of the church scene, the final act of the shaking tent reveals the resiliency and power of Indigenous women. Niska's potent reconnection to her spiritual gifts represents the potential for all Indigenous women to reawaken their own erotic empowerment. Niska's return to the land and ceremony demonstrates that even with our current legacies of land removal and dispossession, we can still discover the erotic elements of resistance and corporeal sovereignty.

ecstasy.

SCENE TWO: A BLOODY POWER

Blood. A paradoxical representation of life and death. Our exploration of Niska's critical moments of moontime (menstruation*)* and the connection to her role as Windigo killer, reader, includes the complex weaving of corporeal sovereignty, power, gender relations and reimaginings of "womanhood," femininity, and mothering.

Moontime teachings and ceremonies are critical in several ways to the Indigenous erotic. Although Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island held varying beliefs about moontime, they often honoured this important moment with coming-of-age or puberty ceremonies, like the strawberry or berry ceremony. The strawberry ceremony referred to by Niska is also known as the Berry Fasting ceremony. According to Anderson's article on puberty ceremonies, the berry fasting ceremony has many elements, including the participants – prepubescent girls

– abstaining from any berry products, even artificially flavoured ones, for an entire year (166). This fasting is symbolic. It is not just a representation of dedication. This ceremony is viewed as a critical teaching leading to the lifelong practices of "industry, self-reliance, self-restraint and connection to the spirit" (Anderson 87). These practices extend across the girls' entire lives. Renee Mzinegiizhigo-kwe Bedard (Anishnaabe) relates, "Women's cycles or blood time, especially the first, are considered powerful medicines. It is during the moontime when women are the strongest, and release that blood from their bodies that is most sacred" (2008). The puberty and coming-of-age ceremonies for young women are working to restore the knowledge and practice that speak to the relationships and responsibilities of women to the land and to future generations. For most Indigenous peoples in the past, and for many who are celebrating and practicing moontime ceremonies today, menstruation is not seen as shameful or dirty, nor is it a curse. Anderson shares:

> Contact with Europeans was to change this thinking. Judeo-Christian culture saw menstruation not as a manifestation of female power, but as a manifestation of female sin, contamination, and inferiority. Missionaries did not understand menstruation as a sacred gift; rather, they taught women to see it from Western eyes, as a "curse." (75)

If you have ever had the honour of moontime, please reflect on your first moontime. No need to write, I just want you to think about the guidance that you received (or not) before and after your first menstruation. What did you call moontime then? Do you call it something different now? Were there any celebratory aspects?
How do these questions make you feel?

It is not necessary to regale you, reader, with my first experiences with moontime. However, I will tell you that it wasn't until late in life, when my own daughters were nearing the age of their first menstruation, that I sought out Kehteyak for moontime teachings. I

was not given these teaching when I was younger and, sadly, often thought of moontime as a curse. Kehteyak have shared some of their understandings of moontime with me, and I am told that moontime was bound to power, that women were honoured and respected for their ability to cleanse themselves and reconnect with the land every month. Women are given two gifts that men do not have; they can bring life into the world, and they bleed. When a woman bleeds, she reconnects to the land, and she purifies herself with the cycles of the moon much like the tides purify the beaches. A woman's moon cycle is her time of power. She is a river whose current changes direction every 28 days, for four days. She is open to spirit purification and deep healing in ways that men are not. If a woman honours this ceremony, she is restored, and may find new healing and medicine. A woman's time is during the darkness of night and the new moon is her time of deepest ceremony and healing. Moontime is a ceremony, and there are grandmothers who hold moon lodges that celebrate this ceremony.[72]

So, with this bit of moontime knowledge, let us reacquaint ourselves with Niska. The first mention of moontime in the text comes about with Niska's contemplation of her upcoming inaugural moontime. This passage reveals the significance of a Nehiyaw'iskwêsis[73] Indigenous girl's first blood to her community. Niska says, "I was nearing the time of my strawberry ceremony, when the women closest to me would keep me in our askihkan [tent] all day, talking to me, praying, telling me stories, preparing me for my first blood of womanhood" (36). Unfortunately, for all Indigenous peoples (not just those who experience moontime), the Indigenous erotic has been compromised due to the dramatic change in perspectives on moontime. This disruption of the erotic not only brings shame and disgust,

[72] Oskâpew says, "I won't speak further about moon lodges, I haven't been given permission to share the teachings, nor do I have the right to talk about them in detail. People who wish to know more can search out this information for themselves, through proper protocol and ceremony."

[73] Oskâpew says, "Nehiyaw'iskwêsis means Cree girl. You have learned that: Nehiyawe = Cree, iskwêw = woman, so … if you add the diminutive suffix, 'sis' on the end, altogether it means 'little Cree woman.' Nehiyawewin makes so much sense, don't you think, reader?

but also severs any potential relationship/kinship bonding reinforcement that comes from the process of "talking to me, praying, telling me stories, preparing me" (36). Similar to my crocodile-tears story, this passage relays how storytelling (in Niska's case, during her strawberry ceremony) and accompanying laughter, advice, jokes, teachings, and teasing acts as a bonding mechanism to strengthen kinship ties. The absence of cultural events such as puberty or coming-of-age ceremonies undermines the erotic by failing to provide the space and time for reinforcing essential relationships. Do you recognize and appreciate, intrepid reader, the erotic territory established within *Power in My Blood*?

The settler disruption of the erotic brought changes to Indigenous understandings of moontime, and while Anderson uses the words "spiritual dislocation," I think of the corrupting forces of Judeo-Christian values around sex and sexuality as anti-erotic. Anderson states, "The shame-based interpretation of menstruation contradicted the teachings of ancestors that puberty was a sacred time, and played into the spiritual dislocation of Native women with the arrival of Christianity" (76). As well, the influence of patriarchal colonialism altered and corrupted Indigenous understandings of sexuality and gender that also undermined the agency and responsibilities of Indigenous women. Today, the vast majority of the population label menstruation as a curse, and/or a simple biological function indicating a woman's ability to bear children. This section reveals the role of menstruation and blood, its cultural meanings and societal indications, and how these aspects relate to power. Niska's journey of power reveals the potential of the Indigenous erotic and provides alternative perceptions and practices of gender and sexuality. The reimagining and revisiting of moontime traditions serve to reconnect us to each other through the power of ceremony and kinship.

To begin, Anderson's article on the berry fasting ceremony elucidates the critical importance placed on puberty and coming-of-age ceremonies for many Indigenous societies. Pre-contact, this ceremony took place at the arrival of puberty. Today, Anderson explains

that puberty ceremonies are experiencing a cultural renaissance and indicates that menstruating women of all ages, not just pubescent girls, wish to learn and celebrate the teachings of moontime. Indigenous women are seeking out old and new knowledges to recreate new ceremonial practices. The growth of these ceremonies signals the willingness to blend contemporary understandings and historical traditions to reimagine these ceremonies for our women and girls. Anderson explains, "Today certain rites of passage are now experiencing a rebirth in our communities, and they are being practiced in such a way that they support the needs of contemporary Aboriginal youth" (384).

healthy forms of tradition
inspire and provoke
new understandings and relevant approaches
to support the *needs* of a contemporary people.

Embodying the erotic involves reimagining and demands a continual revisiting of how we think, reenact, and discuss forms of traditions like ceremony. As Indigenous peoples, we should always ask ourselves, "Is this applicable, relevant, and helpful for this time and space?"

Marla Powers indicates that the entire Oglala Sioux community was involved in the Buffalo ceremony of first blood (64). She explains, "Nowhere in the data is there any evidence that practices associated with menstruation are in any way considered a sign of defilement or degradation toward the menstruating female" (65). She reveals that menstruation was not considered polluting or unclean, and that rituals related to puberty ceremonies also taught tribal rules of sexual conduct. Passing on knowledge about taboos and sexual conduct played a large part in the puberty ceremonies of the Great Plains societies.

Although many Great Plains cultures viewed menstruation as a time of power for women, cultural restrictions on contemporary women in their moontime restrict them from participating in ceremony. Kehteyak have told me that power is needed from our ancestors and the Creator to infuse our ceremonies with power and knowledge. I have often received conflicting messages with regard to this power. Other Kehteyak say that if a menstruating woman is even physically near ceremony or any sacred objects, she attracts the power of the ceremony with her own power. Due to her moontime being unimaginably powerful, the Spirits are overwhelmed by her power and the ceremony is rendered impotent. Historian Theda Perdue's research on Cherokee women's power and menstruation argues that Cherokee people believed that all blood consisted of a spirit and had life. This meant that not only was ritual care taken during a woman's moontime, but those who hunted or engaged in warfare (which usually included someone's blood) also had guidelines of seclusion, purification, and prayer (4).

Today, I share examples with you, reader, indicating that the vagina and moontime have become a source of danger for Indigenous men. The first story shares the experience of Shannon Thunderbird, a drum keeper, Anishnaabe Elder, and self-proclaimed "radical minority when it comes to Women and Ceremony" who has written on her website about problems with paternalism. She titles one such piece, "An amusing speech from Anishnaabe Elder Warren at the University of Waterloo Protest, on September 27th, 2014." She writes:

> It is in three parts – believe me, you have to find this funny.…
> He said. Women are not to sit at the big drums … blah, blah too powerful, blah blah, the usual clap trap. However, he continued, "If you are going to sit there, then you must sit sideways with knees pressed modestly together. If you sit directly facing the drum then your power will destroy it." I assume he is talking about the power of the Vagina! He actually couldn't really decide if we were to sit or not sit in his world, can't have it both ways, son. (Thunderbird)

The words from this Indigenous male Elder are particularly troubling in the way his speech – under the guise of cultural teachings – reverberates with colonial misogynistic expectations of women's bodies. Within my own experiences, and stories like Shannon's, I feel the irrefragable presence of the oppressor within our cultural ceremonies and activities. Anderson believes that the reimagining of puberty ceremonies like berry fasting is a way to counter this oppression. She states, "For young women who are beginning to encounter their oppression as females, it gives them an alternative story. It is the difference between conceptualizing their bodies' cycles as *The Blood of the People,* as opposed to *The Curse*" (391). Anderson's "Blood of the People" refers to those kinship ties allowed to flourish within the embodied erotic spaces of ceremonies.

Now, let us get back to Niska and her first blood. She is a young girl at the cusp of puberty and eagerly awaiting her first moontime. For Niska's people, the first blood is usually a celebratory event, but the timing of Niska's first moon signals that she will not lead an ordinary life: "When he went outside I placed my hand between my legs and then brought it to my face, stared at the little smear of blood on my fingers, hoping to see some sign of what awaited me" (45). The moment her father ends the lives of two Windigos and leaves the tent, Niska's first blood comes. As you will come to see, intrepid reader, this significant confluence of "blood" events foreshadows Niska's future. Synchronous with her father, as he gathers all of his strength and power to engage with killing the Windigos, Niska is imbued with power through her blood. It is "Blood of the People" (Anderson 391). For some Great Plains societies, like the Nehiyawak, sometimes the timing of a girl's first blood could be indicative of her future or might hold a sign of hoped-for prospects (Powers 58). Niska looks at the blood on her fingertips and hopes "to see some sign of what awaited" her. While the sign that Niska may hope for is that of life-giving, her blood signals death. Hers is the blood of a Windigo killer.

We see a reprisal of Niska's moontime killing power as it surges once more, many years later, to help kill another Windigo threat. The Blood of the People for Niska, then, is not the power to give life. Like her sisters and mothers before her, Niska's blood power guarantees the survival of the people – except that Niska's capacity involves killing and death. A very dark time for the tribe follows her father's killing of the Windigos and Niska's first menstruation. Her strawberry ceremony is forgotten. Others in the camp began to discuss the foreboding nature of Niska's moontime: "[M]y womanhood had come to me like a tainted thing, a sick animal, at the moment it should not have" (46). The passage indicates that Niska is left disturbed and wondering about her first moontime, naming it a "tainted thing" or a "sick animal." She describes her moontime as something unwanted or corrupted, but these feelings quickly pass and Niska is imbued with the same power, insight, and intuition as her father exhibits during the Windigo killing. She reveals her acceptance of this power and she says, "What the gossips did not realize was that I wasn't afraid of my father's actions, his gifts. I desperately wanted to possess them for myself" (46). Possessing these powers allows Niska to embrace her menstrual blood and embrace the erotic power when, as an adult, she, too, is confronted by a Windigo threat. This time it is Niska, not her father, who is the Windigo killer. Her Nephew witnesses the killing: "I felt a warm trickle of my blood running down the insides of my thighs. A sound in the corner caught my attention. I turned quickly. You sat in shadow inside the lodge, watching us" (264).

This event reveals a couple of important markers: the relationship of power to menstruation, as well as the continuation of the cycle of that power within the ties of kinship. Niska's menstrual blood is highlighted each time she is involved with Windigos. As mentioned before, intrepid reader, many Great Plains cultures, including my own Nehiyawak culture, have guidelines for women in their moontime. Researching in this area has proven quite difficult, and with the exception of what I have shared here with you, reader, I could not find much about the influence of menstruating women and ceremony written by

Indigenous people. I can only speak from my position as a Nehiyaw'iskwew. I posit that Boyden's careful maneuvering of Niska and the timing of her menstrual cycle disrupts and recentres Indigenous traditions and culture. Niska's first blood does not adhere to the "regular" customs of her tribe; she is gifted with a different kind of power connected to her moontime. These scenes of moontime reject both positive celebratory coming-of-age cultural beliefs *and* negative colonial notions of menstruation (as unclean or impure); this scene disrupts both concepts and offers up menstruation as a spiritual power. Emma LaRocque states:

> Naturally, we need to transform those traditions that obstruct gender equality; we need to conform thinking and institutions that violate our rights and we need to ensure that our contemporary First Nations and Métis liberation efforts move away from the either-or pattern of sacrificing women's equality in the interests of the ever amorphous "collective." (68)

Niska has the potential to create new meanings for our Indigenous bodies, the remaking and reimagining of traditions as we honour moontime as a power that goes beyond child-bearing abilities and/or motherhood.[74]

So far, curious reader, I hope I have given you some new ways to think about moontime, and to reflect on your own experiences with menstruation. I'll give you a small but powerful example that demonstrates how these ideas relate/transfer to embodied experiences. With her permission, I want to tell you about my sister in WWOS and friend, Erin Konsmo, who currently works as the Media Arts Justice & Projects Coordinator at the Native Youth Sexual Health Network. Erin's artistic talents, energy, and creativity capture the interest and

[74] Oskâpew says, "I realize this statement raises questions about the concepts and ideologies behind Indigenous feminism and mainstream feminism; these are important, complex, and diverse conversations. This is work I intend to explore in later research, but is not in the scope of *Power in My Blood*."

attention of Indigenous youth across the globe.[75] Still a youth herself, Erin has the aura of a well-loved auntie, and she generously shares the wisdom and knowledge she gathers from older aunties and Elders. The moontime teachings Erin shares with youth involve the making of a moontime bracelet. Youth are given coloured beads and a piece of leather or twine to string them together; each bead signifies a different phase in the menstrual cycle. As the group sits in a circle, and Erin talks about the connection between our bodies and the lunar cycle, the young people string together corresponding beads to form a bracelet. Erin's simple but potent embodied experience actively engages both body and mind, and is a very real example of reimagining and remaking cultural traditions.

Returning to Niska, reader, please notice another connection between Niska's power and her sexuality in her tumultuous relationship with her wemistikoshiw.[76] Recall how Niska flees the church scene and cleanses herself in her sweat lodge. Waking up the morning after her sweat, she constructs a shaking tent and prays. Her fear turns to rage and she asks the lynx "to go out and find the source of my hurt and extinguish it" (176). Months later, she finds out the Frenchman, her wemistikoshiw*,* has gone insane. Convinced he is being chased by demons, he throws himself out of a window on the top floor of a hotel (176). With the "source of her hurt extinguished*"* (176), this scene restores balance for Niska. If Niska's power can be so challenged, diminished, and assaulted, and still prevail, we understand that the power that we carry as women has not and never will be extinguished. Although corporeal sovereignty over our bodies may have diminished over the centuries, examples like that of Niska demonstrate the strength and resilience of Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk.

Intellectual and writer Chaw-win-is, also known as Ruth Ogilvie (Nuu-chah-nulth), states that "[o]ur need [is] to remake gender balance as an act of decolonization, rather than

[75] Oskâpew says, "Just have to mention that Erin is the inventor of 'Beaded Condom Medallion Art.' Visit here to see more on her work! http://www.nativeyouthsexualhealth.com/beadingandcondomcases.html ."
[76] Oskâpew says, "Niska also refers to him as 'the Frenchman' or "the Trapper.'"

viewing this process as a simple 'recovering of' or 'reviving of traditional roles'" (12). Waziyatatwin and Yellow Bird (Citizen of the Arikara [Sahnish] and Hidatsa Nations in North Dakota) invoke Chaw-win-is, who argues, "The task of decolonization under our current conditions may require that we de-gender our traditional roles as we re-make them" (12). Reader, you may wonder what the role of de-gendering is in the decolonization process and how it functions. The use of my term "genderful" has shown you that I see gender as being a spectrum, fluid and non-binary. Working with Chaw-win-is's idea of "de-gendering," I posit that de-gendering challenges us to reflect deeply on how gender categories currently operate within Indigenous values and belief systems. To dismantle and deterritorialize the colonial power structure of racist heteropatriarchy, we must first understand its insidious influence and nature.

Niska embodies de-gendered character traits and her lived experiences demonstrate the merging of past ancestral knowledge with present-day realities. Niska is this reimagining; she reveals that traditions, language, and culture have always been capable of change. The de-gendering treatment of Niska serves as a good example of how our survival depended, and still depends, upon our adaptably. The flourishing health of all people rests upon their ability to thrive through, and embrace, change. Indigenous communities prosper by integrating relevant and useful information and knowledge; they continuously morph and evolve with changing surroundings of weather conditions, food supply and movement, landscape reconfiguration, and new encounters with foreign populations. The stories people tell generation to generation reflect the ongoing collective. Usually this ebb and flow dictates a good balance between change and consistency. However, our shared history demonstrates that not all changes indicate a peaceful coalescence. The onslaught of the colonizing tools of religion and assimilationist attitudes resulted in huge gaps in and distortion of our cultural knowledges. Often surviving the extreme brutality and domination of the residential school system meant assimilation and loss of language and culture. Niska

provides a perspective from which to understand the importance of recalling and recentring our traditions.

Niska is the reimagining of an Indigenous woman, and represents an alternative way of envisioning the past, present, and future; her character provides a sneak peek into the possibilities when remaking tradition. The remaking cannot happen without our own Indigenous communities and tribal nations. We must ask ourselves the difficult questions, 1) How are we currently recognizing and attending to our own culpabilities in the project of colonization? Do our everyday actions help or hinder? 2) What of the responsibility of Indigenous men? The sickening history of sexual and gendered violence against Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk reflect our current realities. Indigenous women experience gender oppression and violence at the hands of all men, including Indigenous men. The following sections share further experiences of Shannon Thunderbird and the Thunderbird Women's Big Drum group. Listen to these women warrior voices that challenge and confront ongoing colonial, patriarchal practices.

> *On September 27th, 2014 the University of Waterloo hosted its annual powwow. Weeks earlier, Shannon Thunderbird and the women's Big Drum Group of the drum "Moonstone" had been invited to come and play. But on August 26th a private meeting convened to discuss the invitation of the woman's drum called Moonstone and its place at the powwow. According to Shannon Thunderbird's website, the* Waterloo Paper *and the* Daily Grrr! *(Grand River Media Collective blog) several drum groups (all male) did not believe that women had the right to use the big drum. The women were threatened with violence. Thunderbird asserts that there were many threats of violence. 1) Thunderbird herself was threatened by a male drummer (whose drum group was also invited) with "forcible removal or worse" if she attended the powwow with Moonstone; 2) a graduate student of the University of Waterloo was told "she would not walk again if she attended"; 3) in the meeting, when a woman defended the*

> *rights of the women's group to attend with Moonstone, Mark Lavallee, keeper of Chippewa Traveller's big drum said, "If a Cree man were sitting here, he would get up and punch you in the face." Eventually the University of Waterloo rescinded their offer to the women to attend the main event, offering instead a place to drum outside the main forum. How appropriate for a historically marginalized population to be on the margins once again. While the rescinded offer may seem just a small insult, these "small" gestures create a mindset condoning violence against Indigenous women. (Thunderbird)*

One of the requirements of decolonization includes the removal of distorted colonial values from Indigenous cultures and values. Andrea Smith emphasizes:

> It has been through sexual violence and through the imposition of European gender relationships on Native communities that Europeans were able to colonize Native peoples in the first place. If we maintain these patriarchal gender systems, we will be unable to decolonize and fully assert our sovereignty. (139)

It is not enough for *only* Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk to insist on the removal of patriarchal colonialism; we need Indigenous men to speak and to act.

KISKINOWASIHTA – INDIGENOUS MEN

> *You berate me, you try shame me.*
>
> *You tell me to wear a skirt to cover myself, close my legs together chastely in ceremony. Should I close my eyes, too? Should I close my eyes tight, never witnessing the violence you commit against my sisters? Should I close my mouth, too? Should I shut my hands and do nothing as 1,800 sisters go missing or murdered? Should I shut my mouth when I am left out of our pipe ceremonies – not because it is a man's pipe; I respect that, we have women's pipes too! – but because you say the*

circle is too big and we don't have enough time for everyone? We. do. not. have. enough. time.

Don't you know that it is the circle that makes us strong?
I know **who** I come from; remember who you come from!
Mothers, aunties, grandmothers, sisters!
We are your mothers
you are our sons.
make the time.

Violence against Indigenous women is everywhere, from the brutal violence inflicted on my sisters Marlene, Tina, and Loretta to the treacherous violence in our cultural spaces. Please take this space and time to remember and/or reflect. Close your eyes, take four deep breaths. Inhale for two counts and exhale for four counts.

What responsibilities do we bear as Indigenous individuals, as Indigenous nations, as Canadian citizens? Dian Million (Tanana Athabascan), in her article "Felt Theory," contends that Indigenous women must "creat[e] new language for communities to address the real multilayered facets of their histories and concerns by insisting on the inclusion of our lived experience, rich with emotional knowledges" in order to "underline again the importance of felt experiences as community knowledges that interactively inform our positions as Native scholars, particularly as Native women scholars" (54).

Clearly, our actions and inactions in our Indigenous communities, including rural and urban centres, off- and on-reserve, have had little or no effect on the level of sexual and gendered violence against our Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. Engaging in the erotic tactics of agency and responsibility enables us to challenge what Dawn Martin-Hill

(Mohawk, Wolf Clan) described as "distorted traditionalism."[77] The languages that Million suggests must be created need to challenge the existing patriarchal colonialism that exists in our traditions, cultures, and ceremonies. Leanne Simpson speaks directly to Indigenous men who either engage in or remain silent about gender violence: "[T]hey [Indigenous men] are working in collusion with white men and on behalf of the settler colonial state to further destroy Indigenous nationhood. They are traitors to both Indigenous nationhood and resurgence and it is time to destroy that allyship" (L. Simpson).

They are traitors.

So, reader, this discussion involves understanding what our roles and responsibilities are as Indigenous women, men, genderful folk, and allies. Indigenous erotics opens up opportunities for each of us to discover the Indigenous feminine and masculine aspects of ourselves. We are able to be confident in all the sensations of the erotic, pushing aside what qualifies as male and as female. We are self-possessed and unashamed in our celebration of our erotic selves. We do not deny, oppress, or subjugate any parts of our sexual selves or others. Our embrace of the Indigenous erotic – of our desires and sensuous feelings within ourselves – threatens the established social order and opens up potential for decolonization. An eroticanalysis supports an integration and re-embodiment of the erotic that involves a reimagined state combining new interpretations of precolonial traditions and belief systems with contemporary egalitarianism. I argue that these erotic ideals are reimagined and played out within powerful characters like Niska and the language of storytelling. As well, Rifkin suggests the following:

[77] Oskâpew says, "This is the phenomenon of 'traditions' having either been censured or distorted with patriarchal, sexist beliefs to reflect the colonial state and church. In Brian Joseph Gilley's work on Two-Spiritedness, he critiques the 'traditional philosophies' of heterogendered forms of sexual and gender expression; he states, 'They also hear Indian people rebuke colonialism and the political-economic situation caused by European intervention in the same breath that these tribespeople apply Western value judgments on their sexuality.'" (57–58).

> Might the articulation of Indigenous erotics register heretofore unrecognized modes of continuity, either not documented or not readily documentable (kinds of memory, emotion, sensation), while also telling stories of the legacies of colonization, of its effects on the everyday shape, texture, and apprehension of reality? (2012, 30–31)

Rifkin proposes that expressions of Indigenous erotics like "kinds of memory, emotion or sensation" may be used to reveal previously indiscernible or unrevealed language and knowledge. Further, Tomson Highway insists that these changes can lead to a transformation:

> I think that every society is constantly in a state of change, of transformation, of metamorphoses. I think it is very important that it continues to be so to prevent stagnation of our imagination, our spirit, our soul.… What I really find fascinating about the future of my life, the life of my people, the life of my fellow Canadians is the searching for this new voice, this new identity, this new tradition, this magical transformation that potentially is quite magnificent. It is the combination of the best of both worlds … combining them and coming up with something new.

Rifkin's suggestion of erotic articulation and Highway's talk of transformation signal that there is power in resiliency and adaptability. We find this at the heart of *Three Day Road*, with Niska and her influence in remaking Indigenous traditions and social organizations.

So we return to Niska. Even at an early age, Niska is seen as different from those around her. Quite possibly in the beginning it was her seizures and introverted personality that contributed to her being cast as an outsider. She tells the troubled story of her childhood to Xavier as they paddle back home in Niska's canoe:

> I was a young girl with waking dreams of all the trouble that was to come to my life, sharp pains like ice arrows through my temples that dropped me to my back and caused me to convulse. Except for Rabbit, the other children avoided me. Damaged is

> what I was to them, but they wouldn't say this to my face. I was lean and bony with knotted black hair that I refused to let my mother comb. If they thought I was crazy I let them. Laughed at them. (35)

Just as her fits and convulsions made her different from other children, Niska's "lean and bony" appearance, her "knotted black hair," and her indifference to others contributed to her ostracism. The outcast quality Niska embodies throughout the text (which is also seen with the character of Tarsa) has caused me to pause and think about the periods of isolation and shunning both Niska and Tarsa experience with their respective people.

You may wonder, curious reader, why Niska and Tarsa are seen as outcasts and often left outside larger kinship networks. The events and situations in which we find Niska and Tarsa likely seem contrary to my avowals of Indigenous erotica and the ethos of "all my relations." Let me explain what I've recently discovered, and once again let us return to the teachings of "Tante Ohci Kiya?" The one-dimensional plane of kinship may include those who are alive and physically near you (for Niska, it is her mother and then Nephew; for Tarsa, it is her aunt Unahi and then her friend Tobhi), but kinship is so much more complex and deep than that! "Tante Ohci Kiya?" reminds us of this, that it is not simple geographical location or just one relation that shows who we are from. We are reminded that while many of us may seem disconnected or isolated, we are always connected. Our relationships extend past the physical here-and-now, and connect us both to our past ancestors and our future descendants.

Niska is never alone.

You are never alone.

Returning back to the text, we see that Niska does nothing to dissuade her peers from their judgments. She accepts her position as an outsider, "*If they thought I was crazy I let*

them. Laughed at them" (35). Even in her later years, Niska lives a solitary lifestyle, trapping and hunting by herself on the land*: "Long past my father's death I remember how they laughed at me, a woman living alone in the bush and trapping animals after all my relations had gone to the reserves".* Living completely alone did have certain disadvantages. Later in this chapter, the dangers of living alone are discussed, connecting the importance of kinship and relationship.

AGENCY

For an eroticanalysis, corporeal sovereignty requires the critical elements of *agency* and *choice*, and for that reason, the following passages have drawn me. I fear some of Niska's agencies are subtle and easily overlooked, and so my exploration shares with you a modified interpretation of agency. I want to recognize Indigenous women's resiliency and autonomy as quiet yet profound forms of agency.

Years after the events with the trapper, a much older Niska returns to the town to collect Nephew's friend Elijah, who is now returning from the war. Nephew and Elijah had enlisted years earlier. Due to a mix-up in identities and dog tags, Niska believes her nephew is dead and that she is picking up Elijah: *"[We] deeply regret to inform you, Private First Class Xavier Bird, infantry, officially reported died of wound in the field*, *November 3, 1918"*" (5). In a badly translated letter, Nephew is also under the impression that Niska is dead" "*'I was told you were dead, Auntie,' he whispers. 'And I was told you were too,' I say*" (6).

For now, intrepid reader, we must go back to the beginning of *Three Day Road*, when Niska arrives in town. She is first introduced with a humble, self-deprecating comment about herself: "*I must look a thin and wild old woman to them, an Indian animal straight out of the bush*" (3). This seemingly innocuous comment is an important moment of self-reflection for Niska, one in which she turns the gaze back to the wemistikoshiw who would judge her. She may indeed look like an "Indian animal straight out of the bush," but she still chooses to engage with the social structure surrounding her and takes action despite the

hostile environment. As Niska arrives to pick up Elijah, her words demonstrate that she is keenly aware of the attitudes of the townspeople; she understands how others regard her. Niska is stared at openly: "*A small group of wemistikoshiw gathers and stares*" (6), and "*People stare at us, at him*" (7). Returning to the fort after many years, she does not fit the wemistikoshiw stereotype of "homeguard Indian" or Indian temptress, as she may have when she was with her wemistikoshiw trapper. Niska's comment about herself underlines her recognition of the stereotypes that the wemistikoshiw have had and continue to have of her.

In the chapter aptly named "Shakocihew" (Seducing), Niska demonstrates examples of the agency of sexual desire and the unencumbered sexuality enjoyed by Nehiyaw'iskwewak.[78] In many Indigenous societies, women were often the agents of their own sexuality, choosing when and with whom to have sexual relationships. In this next scene, Niska recalls her mother's sexual agency after her father's death: "We weren't always alone out in the bush, Xavier. Although my mother never let another man very close to her after my father, she sometimes liked their company, their quiet talk and easy ways" (130).

Niska's memory of her mother's pleasure in the company of men is a small but significant indicator of the sexual freedom and autonomy of Indigenous women. Niska's mother also indicates her sexual agency through her handling of Niska's father: "'I would never have married your father if I had not pursued him,' she said. 'I hunted him like you hunt a bear. I found out where he lived and paid him a visit'" (167). Niska and her mother maintain control and power over their own sexuality; this mirrors Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine's (Standing Rock Sioux) research:

> [I]n some tribes, especially the Crow, women had freedom in selecting their marriage partners, divorcing their husbands, and controlling their own sexuality. That women of

[78] Oskâpew says, "This means Cree women."

> their own accord sought liaisons with white traders and travelers without fear of punishment speaks of a high rather than low status. (45)

Outsiders first observing the sexual freedom of Indigenous women saw through the lens of a Euro-American perspective mired in ideals of patriarchy, female subservience, monogamy, and marriage.[79] Due to the prevailing attitudes towards women in general,[80] the power and agency of Indigenous women were invisible to European men. The expectations of European women did not include the freedom to choose when and where to have sex, and they most certainly did not have any agency in the matter. David Newhouse, in his article "Magic and Joy," reminds us:

> Throughout the last 500 years, Europeans, and priests in particular, constantly complained about the sexual habits and mores of Indian people that they encountered. They were completely taken aback by what they described as "wanton sex of all sorts"; people did it with no shame, no guilt and no sense of indecency. Not only did we do it often, we did it wrong. Consider the reaction to the sex in "Dances with Wolves" and "Black Robe", two of the most popular movies about Indians over the past decade. Women were not supposed to be the initiator of sex nor were they supposed to be on top! (2)

Do you know the scene Newhouse refers to when he writes, "Women were not supposed to be the initiator of sex nor were they supposed to be on top!" (2), reader? In case you don't, it is my pleasure to fill you in. Newhouse refers to a very sensual scene in the movie *Dances With Wolves* that takes place in a large Lakota tipi on the plains in the 1800s. Invited to stay among the Lakota, a white soldier, settling in for the night, looks across the tipi and discovers a couple in the middle of sex (and yes, the woman is on top). Apparently

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[79] Oskâpew says, "Again, for more details on this topic, see Sarah Carter's book, *The Importance of Being Monogamous: Marriage and Nation Building in Western Canada to 1915."*

[80] Oskâpew says, "*Three Day Road* is set during WWI, 1914–1918, and the prevailing attitude during this time was that white men were superior to all women (white as well as Aboriginal)."

too fascinated to turn discreetly away, the soldier is caught watching. The couple (played by the smoldering Tantoo Cardinal and sexy Graham Greene) stop and glare at him; the soldier turns away, embarrassed. While Hollywood films often include degrading or negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples, this particular scene, however brief, is potent. For Newhouse, the scene not only reveals the relaxed attitude Indigenous people had regarding sex (with the exception of voyeurism, apparently), but it also demonstrates the sexual agency of Indigenous women.

We now return to this scene of Niska, who also enjoys (just as her mother did before her) sexual liberty as an Indigenous woman. At this point in the story, Niska lives alone, living in a self-imposed exile from members of her tribe due to her inherited power. Niska suddenly has a need for company. "*But I was restless. The void inside me was aching, needing to be filled"* (131). She describes the first time she comes across the wemistikoshiw trapper and her anger in finding his traps in her territory. She exerts her superiority and skills in bush living, systematically springing his traps. Her traditional knowledge of the land leaves her with spare time and extra energy, and she leaves large clawed footprints in the snow to resemble some strange beast. She enjoys tricking and frightening the wemistikoshiw trapper with these antics (134). Niska's authority reflects applications of Indigenous women's agency as discussed by historian Jean Barman:

> Agency is by its very nature relational and in traditional societies, Aboriginal women both initiated and responded to change. They scooted around, they dared, they were uppity in ways that were completely at odds with Victorian views of gender, power and race. *(*245)

As time passes and Niska decides to engage further with the wemistikoshiw, she sets out to hunt and trap and eventually seduce "her" trapper. The premise of a seventeen-year-old Indian girl as the pursuer of a "great white hunter" challenges and disrupts the most basic stereotypical imaginings regarding a young Indian girl and an older white male. Typically,

by all outward appearances, these two characters would fit neatly into the male fantasy of the submissive Indian maiden and the superior white male. Niska is sitting by her fire in her tent when she first thinks of pursuing the man: "At first it was less an idea than an image that came late at night while I sat alone by my fire in my little askihkan,[81] the thought of me catching him and keeping him like a pet" (132).

Niska expresses an authoritative voice in this scene; she wants to be the man's captor, not his submissive captive. She does not adhere to the idealized version of a submissive woman, thereby disrupting conventional ideas of gender and sexuality. Beatrice Medicine suggests transcending previously conceived ideas of gender and sex roles to provide space in which individuals are able to maintain their own corporeal sovereignty: "[I]t might be more productive to examine them [these spaces] as normative statuses which permitted individuals to strive for self-actualization, excellence, and social recognition in areas outside their customary sex role assignments" (269).

Niska's self-actualization, liberated from the boundaries of gender or sex role assignments to which Medicine refers, embodies many elements of erotics: nonconformity, agency, authority over oneself, and choice. Niska's decision to take the control away from the trapper (representing the gender and race that are typically shown as dominant) brings to light the attitude that she possesses toward her sexuality. She continues her planning:

> I prepared my askihkan, paying attention to what I'd need. The herb that would make him sleep deeply, the length of rope to tie him, dried berries and moosemeat to feed him, my knife carefully tucked by my sleeping robe if all did not work as planned. The thought of my removing his clothing as he slept, of exploring his pale body, made me want to rush. (133)

[81] Oskâpew says, "Askihkan means tent or lodge."

What readers encounter here is a complete disruption of classic colonial storyline. The scene demonstrates Niska's intention to capture, hold hostage, drug, sexually manipulate, ("exploring his pale body") and perhaps kill a helpless victim, "my knife carefully tucked by my sleeping robe if all did not work as planned." Hardly the conventional victim, the white male's captivity and control reverse and reterritorialize the historical matrix of Indigenous female sexuality. In a sly role reversal, the great white hunter becomes the hunted. Niska challenges contemporary clichéd, derogatory views of Indigenous women and offers instead a powerful model of Indigenous female agency, leadership, and corporeal sovereignty. Without these reimaginings, Jo-Anne Fiske insists, "What Aboriginal women have said ... is that they have the right to give birth to the new government along with men. Aboriginal governments and Aboriginal justice will have a mother and a father or it [sic] will be an abomination rejected by women" (76).

SCENE THREE - KINSHIP AND ONGOING COLLECTIVE

Kinship is a word reflected upon in many sections of *Power in My Blood*. I hope you have a strong understanding of this complex term, reader. Do you remember the most significant difference between the erotic and the *Indigenous* erotic? Not to worry; this section uses several excerpts from *Three Day Road* to demonstrate how the principle of "All My Relations" distinguishes the Indigenous erotic. The concept of "All My Relations" reflects the interconnectedness of all things living on this earth. We are cognizant of our actions because they affect everything around us. We retain a relational accountability to our kin, and these values guide us. Kinship is about regaining strength in the political, social, and economic realms through relationships.

Kinship, for Niska, involves a mostly solitary lifestyle, punctuated by visitors seeking spiritual assistance or visits from her mother. Her mother is Niska's one connection to family. She also has a sister, Rabbit, and Nephew, but these kinship ties seem distant to her; she tells Nephew,

> My sister Rabbit, your mother, still lived, but the talk was that she was a drinker of wemistikoshiw rum and had abandoned her only son to be raised by the nuns in that residential school. The thought of my blood left in that place to fend for himself gave me no end of misery, but I had little choice in the matter. (214)

This passage discloses a familiar story of residential school survivors who, like Rabbit, "a drinker of wemistikoshiw rum," (214) turn to substances like alcohol to let their memories "sit someplace else for a little while" (172). While Niska, Rabbit, and Xavier are physically disconnected from each other, they are only alone if they *ignore* the concept of "All My Relations" and the correlated teachings within "Tante Ohci Kiya?" The anti-erotic severs the spiritual and physical ties to "All My Relations" and leaves us weakened and vulnerable.

Of course, the pinnacle of the Indigenous erotic would see us embodying the erotic in every facet of our daily lives. For many of us, this is not always possible. We suffer, we grieve, and we sometimes isolate ourselves from those we love. We can't help but live in the anti-erotic sometimes. This is how I understand Niska after her mother's death, when she feels intensely isolated: "I was alone now, with no one to watch me" (214–215).

In Dakota ethnographer Ella Deloria's work *Waterlily,* on traditional Dakota Sioux life, and in her analytic description of Dakota Sioux life in *Speaking of Indians,* she elaborates upon kinship as the central marker for being a human. Deloria relates that "the ultimate aim of Dakota life, stripped of accessories, was quite simple: one must obey kinship rules; one must be a good relative" (*Waterlily,* xxiv). Throughout the text of *Waterlily,*[82] Deloria sees the significance of kinship signified by the characters' interrelated web of tribal life. She goes on to say, "To be a good Dakota, then, was to be humanized, civilized. And to be civilized was to keep the rules imposed by kinship for achieving civility, good manners, and a sense of responsibility toward every individual dealt with" (xxxiv).

[82] Oskâpew, "Ella Deloria's *Waterlily* is often seen as a rare glimpse into the everyday life of a Dakota woman. While many criticize the book as romanticizing a utopian past, the descriptive elements are often heralded as one of the most authentic female narratives of Dakota Sioux life."

Each person is defined by those who surround him or her, every one accountable to the other; every facet of touches every other. Niska's anti-erotic isolation is coupled with a dangerous element, as the fits and seizures she experienced in her younger days return. "*The fits were violent and painful*" (215). Her seizures leave her vulnerable to the elements and to ranging predators. During one of her seizures, Niska decides to reconnect with Nephew, the son her sister abandoned to residential school:

> During one of my fits the face of a boy came to me. There was no doubting that he was my relation. His nose was mine, his eyes carried the same sharpness. His ears stuck out from his head. I realized I was seeing you, Nephew, that you needed me as much as I needed you. (216)

Niska recognizes the need for kinship for her and Nephew's survival, and while they do not enjoy the physical benefits that come from a large community, they gravitate towards each other nonetheless. Her body nurtures his, as much as he nurtures her. Great Plains tribes travelled in groups of various sizes that often depended upon the abundance of food sources, and so the size of the tribe ultimately depended on the level of available sustenance. Tribes were made up of family dwellings that extended beyond what is typically known as the "nuclear" family. Any dwelling might include (but was certainly not limited to) any number of parents, children, sisters, brothers, aunties, uncles, and grandparents. Extended families were the norm within these egalitarian societies; nuclear families (just two parents and their children) were rare. Small family units, like that of Niska and Nephew, were often seen only in times of hardship and unusual circumstances.

So we understand Niska's care for Nephew as having dual intentions. Her first motive is to increase her chances for continued survival (she was vulnerable alone when she had seizures); more importantly, however, Niska is eager to pass on her cultural knowledge, language, and traditions. Much like the connective tissues that link people in my story "Tante Ohci Kiya?", the relevance of kinship is clearly demonstrated by the reciprocal

relationship of Niska and Nephew. Niska provides ongoing collective knowledge (language, culture through generational narratives, stories, memory and traditions):

> I taught you all I knew about the bush, the best way to snare rabbits and how to use their fur for protection against the cold brutality of winter, how to weave and walk in snowshoes through the deep snow, how to approach a moose downwind and even how to snare one, how to make your own clothing and moccasins, what plants and herbs were edible and which had healing properties. (220)

Niska gave Nephew the experience and knowledge to live on the land, and in doing so, provided him with life. Niska taught Nephew the erotics of the land – the sensual relationship with all living things (animals, humans, plants). Reciprocally, Nephew provided company and acted as a protector of her when she had her fits. Most importantly, Nephew became the beacon of the future. To continue the ongoing collective, she says in her letter to Nephew, "I said you must return home, for you were the last in our family line. One day you would raise your own child and teach him what had been taught to me" (301).

Let us drift away from Niska and Nephew briefly; I want to return to the language of Nehiyawewin. Remember the knowledge I shared? I said that kinship is embedded within our language and is borne out and embodied within our physical actions. The foundation of Nehiyawewin demonstrates the importance of relationships, not only with each other but also with

the land.

There is a video called *Inspired by the Land* that I watch sometimes when I sit in my office of bricks and mortar. I work in a building called Pembina Hall at the University of Alberta. The land on which the university now sits is in the traditional territory of the Papaschase band and is covered with buildings, concrete, and steel. Don't get me wrong; I like most of what the concrete and steel holds (my colleagues, students, libraries, and

Starbucks), but I miss being on the land. So I light some sage in my abalone shell, open my window, and I watch the video as the camera pans over the Saskatchewan plains. I listen to Wes Fineday and Judy Bear (Nehiyawe Sweetgrass First Nations) speak, watch the sight of the sweat lodge being built, and with the smell of the sage, I am comforted.

Watch the video, you might feel the land too.

(*Inspired By the Land* 4:21 running time)

http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/allensapp/video/vision_traditionnelle_du_monde-traditional_worldview-eng.php

As you continue with Niska in a few moments, remember these words from the video, spoken by Elder Judy Bear (Nehiyawe from Sweetgrass First Nations):

> When you speak Cree, the language begins from the land, you know; you cannot communicate unless you have the words that come from the land. It is this connection with the land and with each other that holds us accountable within our tribal laws. It is the interconnected webbing that binds and tethers us together. (*Inspired by the Land*)

Returning to Niska, we see that she shares her knowledge of the erotic with Nephew as they live, hunt, trap, and fish on the land. Like her ancestors before her, Niska was taught about the interrelatedness of all things. This connection is the power of the erotic; we are accessing deeply sensual knowledge of the land, and of ourselves. Deloria's work on traditional Dakota Sioux living consistently reveals the rootedness of kinship within Great Plains cultures:

> Any family could maintain itself adequately as long as the father was a good hunter and the mother an industrious woman. But socially, that was not enough; ideally it must be part of a larger [extended] family, constituted of related households [as in

> kinship]…. In the camp circle such groups placed their tipis side by side where they would be [within] easy reach for cooperative living. In their closeness lay such strength and social importance as no single family, however able, could or wished to achieve entirely by its own efforts. (20)

The early 20th century continued to be a tumultuous time for Indigenous peoples, and fractured many kinship systems. As Deloria described, prior to this time, Plains Nehiyawak communities were made up of families that extended beyond the nuclear family. The imposition of the nuclear family model was designed to naturalize the heteropatriarchal regime of the settler state, and had detrimental effects on Indigenous kinship relations. A detachment from the land meant isolation and disconnection from each other.

This final scene reaffirms the significance of kinship and is outlined within the passage of Niska's first experience with a Windigo. Niska replays her early memories of her people and her father to Nephew, and she tells him a story about her hookimaw (Chief or leader) father and the Windigos. In Niska's telling, the band has not found any game for months and people are starving. Against her father's advice, a young hunter named Micah, his wife and child leave the larger group and set off alone to find game. This passage represents one of the dangers one may encounter if one chooses to leave the safety net of family and kin. "They were going to head off with their young families in hopes of surviving. In the end only the headstrong young Micah and his wife and baby walked into the bush alone" (40). The reason for leaving the comfort and protection of the larger group is logical: Micah believes that there will be more game where there are fewer people.

Micah and his family set up camp four days' walk from the main camp, and while his first hunting foray brings home a snowshoe hare, no more animals are seen. His fishing fares even worse and one night he freezes to death. His wife finds him the next morning and, in her desperation, she feeds off his dead body: "She drew her knife from her shawl and

leaned toward her husband. He was keeping his promise to feed her and the child" (42). Without family or kinship ties, and without witnesses, Micah's wife was able to break the tribal law against cannibalism. She and her child become creatures known as Windigo, and Niska's father is forced to kill both mother and child. This violent scene is a powerful reminder to the rest of the tribe of the magnitude of the crime, but also of the result of leaving the group. Micah and his family's eventual demise becomes a symbolic statement of the consequences involved when one denies the strength of kinship and relationship. Becoming the Windigo, for Micah's wife, is the ultimate detachment from the erotic. As Windigo, she is disembodied, she feels nothing but hunger, and she is devoid of the passions of life, love, and joy.

The thriving, healthy collective body is made up of a complex, interconnected web of relationships; each group acts as a security network and a system of accountability. Breaking tribal laws becomes more difficult in a larger group. Members of the group are dependent upon each other and build upon established ties. Communal language and the Indigenous tradition of oral storytelling (as Niska displays as she tells the story to Nephew) are vital elements to continued survival. Deloria echoes this message of tribal survival:

> The ultimate aim of Sioux life, stripped of accessories, was quite simple: one must obey the kinship rules; one must be a good relative. No Dakota who has participated in that life will dispute that. In the last analysis every other consideration was secondary — property, personal ambition, glory, good times, life itself. Without that aim and the constant struggle to attain it, the people would no longer be Dakota in truth. They would no longer even be human. Thus only was it possible to live communally with success; that is to say, with a minimum of friction and a maximum of good will. (20)

Kim Anderson also discusses kinship and the focus of relationship-building as a foundation for overall community health and well-being: "The focus on relationship building demonstrates how individual and community health and well-being were connected: as noted, the health of the individual was understood to be the health of the collective and vice versa" (168).

Had Micah and his wife stayed with the rest of the camp, cultural taboos would have stopped her from consuming her husband's flesh. The community's overall well-being and survival depended upon following these rules, and if Micah's wife had attempted to consume the flesh of her husband in front of witnesses, she would have been physically prevented from doing so. Micah's wife and child, as Windigos, became a great risk to the group, threatening its very survival, "We are too weak already and Micah's woman's madness can surely spread in these bad times" (45). Thus the actions of the tribe were quick and decisive. Within a matter of a few days, Micah's wife and child were held down and strangled to death by Niska's father. With the entire group in imminent danger, it was the responsibility of the leader to make unilateral decisions. While Great Plains societies are often diplomatic and consensual in decision-making, there are moments in a tribe's time when a rapid, unilateral choice must be made.[83] The lives of the tribe's members were endangered, and thus the decision made by Niska's father to kill mother and child was accepted and endorsed. His rise to hookimaw happened due to his reputation as a Windigo killer:

> They talked of my father's reputation as a Windigo killer, of how as a young man he became our hookimaw after killing a family of them who roamed near where we trapped, a family who had once been part of the caribou clan but had turned one hard winter and begun preying on unsuspecting Cree (45).

[83] Oskâpew says, "For more information on Cree leadership, see Fine Day's memoir, written by D.G. Mandelbaum: *The Plains Cree, An Ethnographic, Historical and Comparative Study*, New York: AMS Press, 1940."

The tribe is as dependent on the leader, as the leader is on the tribe. Bloodlines and kinship are not always a given when choosing a new leader. Often, deciding factors are a combination of hereditary gifts and skills, along with the upbringing of the child. Niska is deeply connected to her tribe in this way, especially through the bloodline of both her parents – her father, a powerful medicine person, and her mother, a healer. Niska's connection through her father's line is strong and this is demonstrated throughout the text. She constantly speaks to the power that runs in her family, her hereditary lineage of Windigo killers: "I had the power and watched it slowly recede. I am the second to last in a long line of Windigo killers. There is still one more" (48). People are aware of her hereditary gifts and, even outside her camp, seek her skills out. From the beginning of the book, you and I, reader, understand Niska to be a relation of Nephew; but as we have discussed, the relationship extends far beyond Western principles of family ties. May I remind you that, for many Indigenous families, biological categories and kin categories do not work separately from each other. Sarah Carter uses Raymond DeMallie's work on kinship to describe these relationships:

> [A]n individual has many mothers and fathers. This does not mean, for example, that mother's sisters are *like* mothers; they *are* mothers. In other words, the status of the mother is defined in terms of patterns of relations surrounding, but not limited to, the act of giving birth. The biological mother is no more or less a mother to her children than are all those women she calls sister. (105)

Extended nuclear families are not seen by Euro-Canadian eyes as normative; a family unit generally consists of a mother, father, and biological children. Other relationships and kinship ties are seen as weaker than direct biological ties. The attempted assimilation of the Nehiyawak began with the destruction of their extended families. Kinship ideologies and interconnected relationships were thoroughly disrupted as children and their kin were wrenched apart by colonial strategies of dispossession and disempowerment. The

relationships that bound groups together were forced apart through colonial tactics, policies of starvation, the removal of children to residential schools, the removal of identity and community from Indian women (and from their female children, who lost their Indian status by marrying non-Indian men), the Sixties Scoop,[84] and the forced sterilization of Indian women and girls.[85]

The Indian Act was, as Jo-Anne Fiske describes, "designed to create a patriarchal family unit in First Nations societies that already had a variety of kinship systems, including many matrilineal and matrilocal ones" (307). A fundamental strategy to dispossess Indigenous people was to break kinship ties. This particular section of the Indian Act hugely supported assimilation. This also included the discriminatory provisions in the Indian Act (specifically s. 12 [1][b]), which until 1985 stripped First Nations women of their legal status as Indians when they married non-Status men. However, staying true to Euro-Canadian codes of patriarchy, upon the marriage of Status Indian men to non-Indian women, these women and any subsequent offspring became Status Indians. These laws not only subjugated and regulated First Nations women and undermined their power, they also removed them from their lands. Indian women and their children could not return to their communities once these ties were severed. Even in instances of divorce from or the death of a non-Indian spouse, once Indian women lost status, they lost their band membership as well. These colonial views of kinship and relationship were eventually embraced by Indigenous men, and can be seen playing out in every corner of Indigenous lives – from the political venues of the AFN[86] and NWAC[87] to powwows and ceremonies.

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[84] Oskâpew says, "The 'Sixties Scoop' refers to governmental policies in the late 1950s and 1960s that led to thousands of Aboriginal (First Nation, Métis and Inuit) children being taken from their homes and adopted or fostered in non- Aboriginal families."

[85] Oskâpew says, "The Sexual Sterilization Act adopted by the Federal Government in 1928 allowed for sterilization of populations deemed unfit to procreate. These people often included Indigenous women and girls as well as people suffering from mental illness."

[86] Oskâpew says, "The AFN is the Assembly of First Nations and is the largest federally recognized organization of First Nations people."

Living in a state of anti-erotic hetero-patriarchy leaves us weakened and vulnerable. I believe as Fiske does: "[K]in ties are evoked as symbols of community and nation; blood and culture, not law, define ethnic identity and citizenship within a Nation that nurtures and sustains her people" (77).

Our understanding of our erotic selves begins with kinship, with "All My Relations."

I know who I come from; do you?

> *So when I am asked again, "Tante ohci kiya?" I will say this: 'Nikawiy [my mother] Carol Bear, daughter of Lillian and Edgar Bear; Edgar Bear, son of William Allan Bear. My great-grandfather was found as a bawling infant by a 15-year-old girl one early morning in May of 1885, underneath his dead mother's body on the battlefield of Cut Knife Hill. That day, my great-great grandmother, Ruth Bear of Red Pheasant, became his mother and carried him home.*
>
> **Tante ohci kiya?**[88]

[87] Oskâpew says, "NWAC is the Native Women's Association of Canada and serves as one of the five recognized National Aboriginal Organizations. www.nwac.ca."

[88] Oskâpew says, "This is who I come from."

CHAPTER FOUR – TARSA'DESHAE

For this last chapter, I have chosen Tarsa'Deshae from Daniel Heath Justice's *Kynship* omnibus as the second character upon which to focus an eroticanalysis. But before we meet Tarsa, let me tell you a little about Justice. Having spent time with Justice on different occasions, including conducting an interview with him, I wish introduce you to him. In his article *Fear of a Changeling Moon,* Justice discusses his childhood and his overwhelming need to delve into the fantasy worlds of Oz, Krynn, and Middle-earth. These were places in which he could understand and accept himself, he says:

> The realm of the fantastic was a safe place for the weird kids like me. A fluid understanding of gender and identity, together with a love of the myths, fairy talks and legends of faraway places and people combined to create imaginative possibilities far beyond the realities of the fading little mining town I called home. (92)

Through the genre of fantasy, Justice introduces readers to emergent characters, characters who transcend current feminine or masculine tropes and offer up new worlds of alternative understandings of gender and sexuality. Indigenous erotica, in the form of re-imaginings of moontime, kinship, and gender are further explored in this chapter as an instrument for decolonization**.**

Further, the genre of fantasy also became a safe access point for me as a Nehiyaw'iskwew to a Cherokee-centred worldview. While the Cherokee and Nehiyawak may have many similarities (spiritual worldviews, peoplehood, egalitarian societies, war/peace chiefs, warrior women, and comparable experiences of dispossession and displacement of land through colonization), we are diverse nations. By using Justice's fantasy world of Everland, I seek to circumvent the dangers of forcing a Nehiyaw'iskwew perspective upon Creek worldviews. In this way I try avoid misrepresenting or essentializing the complex richness of the Cherokee/Creek existence as some pan-Indian experience.

I share Justice's *Kynship* offers alternative frames of personhood, nationhood, sexuality, and gender and manages to demonstrate alternative ways of envisioning the past, present, and future. My erotic interpretations are similar to those found in my chapter on Niska, and are explored in three parts: 1) we delve, once again, into the power of moontime, a time Justice describes as a "burning with life's fire" (15), and look into the representation of symbols of power and strength; 2) we explore Tarsa's experiences with genderful folk and are introduced to new, gender-ambiguous characters called zhe-Kyn; and 3) finally, we examine the expansive meaning of kinship and the ongoing collectivity that occurs within these relationships.

Indigenous scholars Driskill, Justice, Miranda, and Lisa Tatonetti state in the foreword of *Sovereign Erotics* that they do not wish to create a monolithic analytic lens; rather, they seek to

> bring Indigenous-specific critiques of colonial heteropatriarchal gender/sexuality into broader conversations within queer and Indigenous studies that link queer Indigenous people within and across Indigenous nations, colonial borders, and global networks. (3)

So, reader, I hope that by working through an eroticanalysis of the character of Tarsa'Deshae, I can also avoid a monolithic analytic lens, but rather expand the ways in which we think about gender and sexuality by examining emerging expressions of Indigenous erotics within Indigenous literature.

SCENE ONE – BLOODY POWER

In this first book of the series *Kynship,*[89] called *The Way of Thorn and Thunder*, Justice delivers a powerful reimagining of moontime through the adventures of the Redthorn warrior Tarsa. The following passages from *Kynship,* along with Justice's own words from an interview, storytelling, and embodied experiences provide important platforms for 1) further acknowledging moontime as powerful and healing, a cycle that benefits all Indigenous nations; and 2) unsettling settler-inspired logics that have inculcated dangerous aberrations in "traditional" understandings of moontime, and being critical about essentialist claims that menstrual blood signals the ability to create life and therefore fulfills the primary element of womanhood.

Readers, for those of you unused to the genre of fantasy, remember Justice's words: "imaginative possibilities far beyond the realities of …" (92). For Justice, and for you, reader, *Kynship* offers a fantasy-world version of the historical and contemporary colonization of Indigenous societies of North America. *Kynship* presents the opportunity for us to leave the "realities of [a] fading little mining town" (92) – or whatever our realities may be – and enter a realm of "imaginative possibilities" (92). Are you ready?

This fantastical world begins with a battle scene, and here Justice introduces us to the story's main protagonist, the she-Kyn Tarsa. She is a member of the Redthorn warriors, who are in the midst of a battle with a creature of death called Wears-Stones-For-Skin (also known as the Feaster). As the name implies, Wears-Stones-For-Skin is deadly and has skin so strong it is almost indestructible, with very few vulnerable areas. Wears-Stones-For-Skin is an ancient warrior who always leaves a trail of destruction and devastation in his wake. His lengthy experience has taught him to consider the Kyn villagers as easy prey, and Wears-Stones-For-Skin is looking forward to feasting on the folk of Everland on the day we meet him (13–14). He smells the fear of the he-Kyn at the upper rim of the narrow gorge,

[89] Oskâpew: "This trilogy has since been published as an omnibus."

but as he turns the corner, he is confronted by a lone she-Kyn standing in the middle of the path. Recognizing her as a Redthorn warrior, Wears-Stones-For-Skin is not worried, because to him, she is small and inconsequential. But all of a sudden there is a change in the air, and his stampede towards her slides to a stop:

> *Something was wrong. It wasn't the Redthorn's determined stance that unnerved him. It was something else that fluttered moth-like around his thoughts, elusive but vital. Then he knew, and his blood became ice: he'd never smelled her.* (14)

Wears-Stones-For-Skin doesn't smell the Redthorn warriors, because he doesn't recognize their smell. The scent of moontime and power is not part of his memories. This ancient creature has never battled warriors like this before; their power, like the lack of scent, is alien to him. He feels a terror creeping upon him as six other she-Kyn step onto the path behind him:

> All were in their moon-time, like the solitary figure who now stood at his back. Unlike the four town matrons who also walked toward the cringing Feaster, the Redthorn warriors were fully trained in blood and battle. But this cyclical power made all the she-Kyn doubly powerful. (15)

In this passage, Justice uses powerful imagery of Indigenous women warriors at the height of their strength and power – during their menstrual cycles. He writes, "He was death's shadow – they burned with life's fire" (15). The "life's fire" of these Redthorn warriors may be imagined as a signal of their ability to bring forth life. However, just as Niska's "life's fire" did not refer to pregnancy and childbirth, this is also not the case with the Redthorn Warriors. Their "life's fire" refers to the *taking* of life. When Niska "burns with life's fire*,"* she faces the deadly power of the Windigo. So too do the Redthorn warriors face a formidable beast of old. For these warriors, menstrual blood foreshadows death. Wears-Stones-For-Skin is described as "a Feaster, one of the Eaters of old, and his thick gray skin

was dense with thousands of jagged stones that protected him from most wounds" and with "his massive bulk – twenty feet high, and at least half that wide … [he] walk[ed] with the ease of a two-legged panther" (12–13).

The terror that Feaster feels at the sight of the warrior weakens him: "His ancient might, the bindings that kept his spirit whole, were scattered on the wind by [the Redthorns'] strength" (15). The creature is irreversibly weakened by his fear of the she-Kyn warriors: "the she-Kyn were stronger still. Their blood-time was power beyond bearing for a creature of death, and he was more terrified now than he'd ever been" (15); the he-Kyn warriors are thus able to help dispatch the beast. Without the power of female blood, Wears-Stones-For-Skin would have destroyed the village and all of its inhabitants. The Redthorns' moontime is a power beyond childbearing and fertility, and signals menstrual blood as a bearer of both life and of death. Both Niska and the Redthorn warriors bring destruction and death upon creatures from ancient stories, and in doing so they ensure the continuity of life. Prior to the battle, the Feaster refers to any of the Kyn as "[t]hose wisdom keepers who had once challenged him [Wears-Stones-For-Skin] and his kind"; he notes that "they were rare these days, driven from these lowlands by their own people, and their teachings lay hidden in the dark, secret places, leaving his ravenous path clear" (12).

The "wisdom keepers" are the followers of the old ways of the Deep Green and would represent those Indigenous people who hold and follow very old teachings and traditions. In this loose allegory, Justice uses the term "Celestials" (who are the "Civilized Ones") to refer to the colonizers. The Feaster refers to them as "others – bright-eyed, hairy creatures with sharp iron and a hunger almost as greedy as his own" (12). As the Kyn population had begun to move farther from the Deep Green[90] and was increasingly influenced by the

[90] Oskâpew says, "The Deep Green is 'the ancient ceremonial and kinship traditions of the Eld Green; maintained by the Wielders. Also known as the Old Ways' (Justice 245). The Eld Green is "[t]he lush, ancient world of the Folk before the arrival of Men' (Justice 245). It is a loose representation of Indigenous spirituality – that may or may not include concepts like 'all my relations.'"

Celestial Path,[91] all Greenwalkers, kith and kin alike, were banished from their towns and families.

Both Justice and Boyden connect the power of moontime with a crucial event immersed in death and destruction. In *Three Day Road*, Niska's first moontime surges forth as her father kills two Windigos, and then again when Niska is forced to kill two others under the Windigo spell. The she-Kyn warriors and Niska are not celebrated as life-givers; their menstrual blood does not represent the ability to create life. Their blood-time is a symbol of power that has the capacity to bring death. For a moment, let us return to the story that Shannon Thunderbird shared about the male Elder and the drum. In that telling, the male Elder was terribly concerned about the destructive power of moontime (and vaginas) and their threat to the drum. How do the killing scenes of the Windigos and the Stoneskin (as Wears-Stones-For-Skin is called) differ? I suggest that the difference between the two scenarios of moontime is agency. The Redthorn warriors (and Niska, on a different level) are aware of the power they hold and use this power to benefit their people. The male Elder in Thunderbird's story saw only a threat of female power, a power that would not strengthen the people, but weaken the men. Both Justice and Boyden have presented readers with female characters whose menstrual cycles do not celebrate the ability to give birth, or represent a "readiness" for marriage and motherhood. While Niska's moontime seems to happen without deliberate control, the she-Kyn warriors strategically plan their cycles to coincide *with* the battle with Wears-Stones-For-Skin.

The synchronization of the she-Kyn warriors' blood time not only reveals their premeditated strategy for battle and agency, but is also a direct consequence of their kinship ties. The harmonization of their moontime cycle is a strong yet subtle reminder to us

[91] Oskâpew: "Justice explains that '[t]he Celestial Path are the philosophical principles of Luran-Worship, descended from Dreyd teachings brought by the Proselytors who accompanied the first Human traders into the Everland. The Path is characterized by a denial of the flesh and an emphasis on the power of the purified mind, a commitment to hierarchy and obedience, a rejection of the *wyr* and the relational values of the Way of Deep Green, and an embrace of the individualistic and commercial values of Humanity'" (244).

of the importance of kinship. Although this chapter further examines kinship later on, there is an important connection between this synchronization of she-Kyn menstrual cycles and relationships that is worth mentioning here. The Redthorn warriors are bound by blood and battle, but they have strong relationships that tie them together as they train for battle, eat, sleep, and socialize. Most menstruating females (and anyone else who lives with them) understand that close proximity to each other (either living in the same household or spending significant amounts of time together) leads to the synchronization of menstrual cycles. The connection between the she-Kyn Redthorn warriors links them together in ways of sisterhood that their he-Kyn counterparts will never experience.

The veneration of Aboriginal motherhood as the *sole* source of power negates and silences other domains of power that women have. Motherhood is not a box to be checked off to become a fulfilled woman. As the murdered and missing statistics on Indigenous women can attest, motherhood does not guarantee or even necessarily garner any respect for women's bodies, much less guaranteeing corporeal sovereignty. Tarsa and the Redthorn warriors step firmly outside the boundaries of many Indigenous traditional paradigms that limit the potential of women by focusing solely on their capacity to create life. In Kim Anderson's book *Until Our Hearts Are on the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*, and particularly the chapter "New Life Stirring," there are examples and personal stories of celebrating Aboriginal women for their fertility, motherhood, and life-giving abilities.[92] I believe that these stories remain important to celebrate and share, but there is a danger in these idealized generalizations of Indigenous women. I suggest, reader, that as women, we respect, acknowledge, and celebrate moontime as a generally powerful aspect of womanhood. It represents the fact that an Indigenous woman's body is her own;

[92] Oskâpew says, "As well, Kim Anderson's article 'Honouring the Blood of Our People: Berry Fasting in the Twenty-first Century,' discusses the 'old days' and how the coming-of-age ceremonies or puberty ceremonies once indicated a readiness for marriage and childbearing (*Expressions in Native Studies,* 387)."

her power is her own. As Niska and characters like Tarsa and the zhe/kyn Fa'alik[93] demonstrate, motherhood is only one role of many that a female can choose to assume in order to fulfill herself. Situated within a Cherokee paradigm, Daniel Heath Justice celebrates his heritage and the stories of his relations with complex characters that extend beyond idealized or simplified versions of our cultures.

Back to Justice's story. After the battle, the he-Kyn stand away from the women's power: "The he-Kyn stood apart from the moon-time females and praised their bravery from a safe distance" (18). Until this point in the story, reader, you may understand moon-time to be a powerful event; a natural occurrence that is integral to defeating bloodthirsty killers like Windigos and Feasters. So why do the he-Kyn stand at "a safe distance"? You may wonder whether they are compelled by the same fear felt by the Stoneskin – the same fear felt by the male Elder in Thunderbird's story.

I want to take a moment from the battle to share some of my cultural teachings on emotion and explain how differences (like the ones between the he-Kyn and Feaster) function within the erotic. Kehteyak have told me countless times that there are really only two pure emotions, fear and love. Every other emotion stems from these two feelings; fear precipitates hate, greed, jealousy, and anger – as much as love embodies trust, respect, courage, and joy. Among the oldest and strongest kinds of fear is fear of the unknown. While the Stoneskin's fear of the she-Kyn's moontime stems from the unknown, the he-Kyn's distancing does not – for they embody the erotic and share a deep respect that stems from the kinship they share *in their community* and as warriors. The he-Kyn's actions demonstrate their respect for the power of the she-Kyn warriors; they feel no anti-erotic fear, as the Stoneskin does. I think right now is a good time to pull into our conversation a couple of teachings that Oglala Lakota teacher Russell Means received from his Elder, Chief Luther Standing Bear. Means shares these thoughts on the topic of patriarchy, fear, and

[93] Oskâpew says, "You will meet Fa'alik soon enough; be patient."

women, "We teach men how to nurture and if you don't know how to nurture then you are going to be afraid." Russell quotes his ancestor, Chief Luther Standing Bear, "If you don't know the forest, you will come to fear the forest, and what you fear, you will want to destroy." Russell goes on to say, "That's patriarchy. Cause you're out of balance. The first living thing that they fear, are their women. Cause they have no understanding of women." (Means)

Stoneskin is a representation of the influence of patriarchy. The maintenance of the patriarchal structure feeds on fear, just like Stoneskin does. Consider these words from Chickasaw artist and curator John G. Hampton, who invokes scholars such as Andrea Smith:

> One of these support-structures [for patriarchy] was the male-dominated hierarchy required to maintain the patrilineal inheritance model that is so crucial to retaining ownership over conquered lands. In order for Native communities to accept colonial domination, colonists needed to impose upon them an acceptance of patriarchal social structures, replete with normalized gender-binary structures and hierarchy. (3)

The he-Kyn and Stoneskin remind us of two paths. The Stoneskin revels in the anti-erotic, a place of greed and hate, until the fear becomes his own, while the he-Kyn reveal how the erotic leads to a place of respect and understanding, "The he-Kyn stood apart from the moon-time females and praised their bravery from a safe distance" (18). As Indigenous people, we need to reject the anti-erotics of colonial domination embedded in fear. Means explains how Oglala men are encouraged to understand Oglala Lakota women:

> And so our ceremonies here on this earth are to celebrate womanhood, to learn minutely. So we go to the *enipy*, the purification lodge, and the sauna so we can feel and have some little notion of what it is like to be purified. And we go through the Sundance and tear our flesh and create the blood because we want to have a minimal understanding at least of what childbirth is all about when she tears her flesh and gives her blood to create life. (Means)

Oglala men are required to understand a woman's bloodtime, and without this knowledge, the unknown can easily lead to fear, and fear leads to hate and destruction. Thus the "standing apart" of he-Kyn demonstrates an understanding for – and therefore a respect (as with Oglala men) for – the power of menstrual blood. Through their own ceremonies and teachings, they are taught to embrace, understand, and achieve balance with all genders within their tribe.

After the battle, Tarsa revels with her sisters in the slaying of the beast, but her happiness does not last. The story of Tarsa takes an abrupt turn, as Justice injects a familiar storyline we all recognize. Tarsa is torn between the call of the Deep Green (representing Indigenous spirituality) and the Celestial Path of the Greenwalkers[94] (representing the foreign religious organizations of the church). We meet Tarsa again when the *z*he-Kyn Fa'alik sings a healing song, and through this ceremony and the preceding battle, something is awakened within Tarsa: "It was the voice of the Stoneskin.… It was an ancient song that twisted into her blood, driving deep, calling down to sing into being the secrets that pulsed there" (19). In this passage, Tarsa has been chosen to become part of a society of women called the Greenwalkers. It is through her blood that she is called to become something more than a Redthorn warrior; a higher power calls her to be a Wielder (29). Much like Niska, Tarsa is set apart from others. Her menstrual blood symbolizes power, but also reveals her unique ability to become a Wielder, and part of the Deep Green. Triggered by her central role in Wears-Stones-For-Skin's death, Tarsa feels the pull of power:

> Yet, amazingly, something new now tugged at the burning tide in her body, and Tarsa responded instantly … she didn't recognize the sensation, but it had a hint of familiarity, like a lingering taste on the tongue of something she'd once known and treasured. (31)

[94] Oskâpew says, "Greenwalkers are 'adherents of the Way of Deep Green' (Justice 247)."

Here I want to give you a reminder of the erotic space you still inhabit. Drift among the last body of words for a moment: "[S]omething new tugged at the burning tide in her body," "responded instantly," "a hint of familiarity," "lingering taste," "something she'd once known and treasured." (31) You have been participating in embodied actions throughout *Power in My Blood*, so for a moment I want you to think about "embodied reactions." This passage with Tarsa is an excellent place to linger and address embodied reactions. What is Tarsa's body responding to? A distant memory? Ancestral memory? Or perhaps a blood memory? An embodied reaction is the irresistible and natural physical response of the body to a stimulus. This stimulus could be a memory, a smell, sound, or taste. Previously, I mentioned that the erotic is not always obvious, that it also comes in subtle forms. I gave the example of listening to my aunties and grandma playing cards and talking about men. Now, when I play cards with my sisters, my body sings happily as I am engulfed in these memories. My body softens, my mind quiets and my shoulders naturally relax when I hear the first powwow drums of the season. These are the embodied reactions of the erotic. Although the erotic sensations of, "…the burning tide…"(31) are meant to give Tarsa pleasure, she ignores these sensations.

Her aunt, Unahi, an experienced Wielder but an outcast,[95] is summoned to help Tarsa survive the bloodsong coursing through her veins, and guide her into the Deep Green (45). But Tarsa's Celestial education has set her mind against the Deep Green. Influenced by her conservative (or anti-erotic) upbringing, Tarsa rejects the erotic embodied in the Greenwalker term "bloodsong call":

> Unahi smiled. "You've been given a powerful gift, niece."
>
> Tarsa flushed. "It's not a gift to me," she corrected. "It's a curse. I don't want it." *(*41)

[95] Oskâpew says, "Unahi had been exiled twenty-six years earlier from her place of birth, Red Cedar Town."

We will explore this short sentence a little more. First, notice how Tarsa uses the word "curse" to describe her "gift"; second, observe Tarsa's refusal of the "bloodsong call[96]." "The curse" is one of the many negative terms commonly used to describe moontime. Puritanical ideologies and Christian values surrounding the "curse" of menstruation have many women regarding moontime as shameful. The curse is seen as pollution or contamination, and a function of a woman's body that must be contained, controlled, and hidden. Tarsa's rejection can be seen as a negation of the corpus of values integrated with the spiritual and ceremonial life of Indigenous peoples (sweat lodge, Sun Dance, potlatch), many of which were prohibited in Canada for many years through the Indian Act. Tarsa's refusal to accept her gift represents how the spiritual practices of Indigenous peoples have been assaulted and destabilized by colonial tactics. As Indigenous people, we internalize the shame and hatred perpetuated by the colonizer and use practices of "tradition" born of self-loathing to justify sexual and gendered violence.

Tarsa's struggle with the bloodsong and Unahi's dispossession of place are so significant! Let us slow down and reflect more on moontime. We will return to Tarsa and her current situation, intrepid reader, after I share some compelling stories with you. I want to continue by sharing these powerful words from Maria Campbell: "Near the end, the non-Native system that fucked me up fucked our men even worse. The missionaries had impressed upon us the feeling that women were a source of evil" (96). The missionaries' conclusion that Indigenous women were "a source of evil" *allowed* the colonial state to enact genocidal policies on Indigenous women's bodies. But *our internalization* of this so-called evil keeps us locked in fear. We learn (as do our Indigenous communities learn) to fear our erotic selves. Our acceptance of this label strands us in the anti-erotic and disempowers us; Lorde argues, "The fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many

[96] Oskâpew says, "The Bloodsong is the connection felt within the body with the Deep Green (aka Mother Nature)."

facets of our oppression as women" (Lorde). Through the upcoming trials and tribulations of Tarsa, I hope you will reflect on Campbell's words on how missionaries (and the Canadian state) believed Indigenous women were a "source of evil" (96) and how this sentiment relates directly to the erotic. Tarsa's experiences outline for us a symbolic connection between Indigenous women's bodies and land and the colonial strategies to displace, dispossess, and eliminate the threat of Indigenous women's bodies for the purposes of colonizing the land.

Embodied Knowledge #4 – WWOS, con't

The following story comes from a personal experience. This occurred as the WWOS Edmonton committee (and National Collective), consisting of Nehiyaw'iskwew and Métis women, including me, delivers the materials and sacred bundle of this powerful art memorial from Edmonton to Regina, Saskatchewan. Knowing that the installation included two eagle staffs, male Elders from the region forbid any of the four Edmonton women or women from Regina to touch the staffs at any time. Despite the fact that the Eagle staffs had been made purposely for women of the memorial and we had already been in contact with the staffs during the Edmonton exhibit, we were told that once we arrived in Regina, we were not allowed to touch the Eagle staffs. Doing so would violate the traditional protocol of the area.

Not only were we restricted from touching the eagle staffs, but we could not even touch the cases in which they rested. Once we arrived in Regina, a male Elder was on site to make sure our women's bodies had no contact with the case carrying the eagle staffs. We arrived and were greeted by the Regina women and the "keeper" of the sacred bundle while it was in Regina. As we sat down to introduce ourselves, the male

> *Elder made his intentions clear and stated that his purpose was to take care of the Eagle staffs. In relative newness in our responsibility to the sacred bundle, we acquiesced to his demands. We hoped to respect the protocol of the territory and we did not want to show disrespect. The "handing over" of the materials and sacred bundle of the art memorial from the Edmonton women to the Regina women naturally evolved into hours of ceremony; there was praying, singing, feasting, and gift giving.*
>
> *The male Elder, realizing the time and energy we required for ceremony as we handed over the sacred bundle, and counting the hours that our ceremonies would take, eventually reconsidered his position. He left as suddenly as he appeared, leaving us to our ceremonies and the Eagle staffs without further constraint. As this story and others like the Gondola experience demonstrate, incidents of racial, sexual, and gendered violence happen every day.*

The federal government's[97] apathetic attitude to the missing and murdered women and its aggressive state policies are not surprising, given our shared colonial past. But what still surprises me (and should not) is this settler-induced coma; we lie in an anti-erotic coma of static tradition and protocol. Nehiyawak are strong, thriving people who have lived on Turtle Island for thousands of years. Each generation builds upon the last. Guided by the understandings of the world around us, we adapt and evolve as the outside world changes around us. When buffalo herds migrated, Nehiyawak moved, too; it is unfathomable to think that our ancestors would remain by some river, hoping in vain that their main food source would return. Our tribal traditions and cultural protocols evolve to keep a steady balance between our physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional needs *and* the physical aspects of the changing world around us. Today, many of us sit by that metaphorical river, held fast by

[97] Oskâpew says, "At the time of this writing, this is the position of a Conservative government under Stephen Harper."

a legacy of colonial values that have bastardized and altered our understandings of sexual identity, gender, and sexualities.

Indigenous women inhabit a place where we are discouraged from questioning traditions or protocol. Being an Indigenous cis female places numerous restrictions and enforcements on my body. While the restrictions may vary from place to place, the protocols for cis women inevitably involve clothing enforcements and restrictions. For example, cultural protocol demands that cis women wear a long skirt covering the ankles to ceremonies, and a flannel nightgown to the sweat lodge (the ones that cover you up to your neck, and down to your wrists and ankles). When I question the enforcement of wearing of skirts and nightgowns, I always get the same argument: that Indigenous women who attend ceremony must exhibit ideals of modesty and virtue. However, cis men have the freedom to wear anything they choose. I've seen fully covered men in t-shirts and sweatpants, and I've seen men wearing shorts that barely cover anything at all. In the realm of ceremony, Indigenous women are expected to comply with culturally gender performative expectations (the wearing of long skirts and sitting with legs together) to express their virtue. Let us take a minute with this word:

virtue

Please go to www.merriam-webster.com and type in the word *virtue.* Look at all the definitions. If you have to click on one of the definitions to get a further definition (as I did in the case of "chastity"), feel free to do so. Read them out loud.

According to Merriam-Webster, the "full" definition of virtue involves seven meanings. This is a perfect example of an English word with language luggage. What do we see?

1. a: Conformity, b: a particular moral excellence

2. Plural: an order of angels
3. a beneficial quality or power of a thing
4. manly strength or courage
5. a commendable quality or trait
6. capacity to act
7. chastity – especially in a woman

Curious about how one word like "chastity" could be "especially for women," I clicked on "chastity." While it would be fascinating to continue to examine these words, curious reader, I intuit that this would be an unsatisfying and unproductive rabbit hole for you and me. So what do Nehiyawak think about this word? How does it translate? Without an Elder present to help with my curiosity, I head to the Cree dictionary website at www.creedictionary.com. I type in "virtue" and get the words "micim ohci ka miyohtwahk – a quality held to be of great moral value," or "kanatatisowin (virtue)." Do you remember that Nehiyawewin does not discern genders, but categorizes the world by animacy? In this way, for Nehiyawak, any "person" can possess kanatatisowin; gender does not qualify you as or restrict you from having "great moral value." When the colonizer's language is used by Indigenous people to explain the role of gender within ceremony, the words are imbued with colonial gender bias and sexism. When I am able to speak Nehiyawewin fluently, I can better prepare for a discussion about virtue and ask why the English word "chastity," signaling honour and integrity, is only applied to women. Also, when I understand Nehiyawewin better, I can explore the morphology of kanantatisowin. For now, I am suspicious of the word *virtue* and all that it implies. If virtue signals honour and integrity, should we not expect this from all genders? The language of the colonizer continues to be one of the barriers in reclaiming our corporeal sovereignty, and this loss reverberates within our communities and our ceremonies.

Our lives without the erotic bind us in a static state. It remains essential that we be reflexive and critique concepts taken as traditional or natural. If embracing the erotic means disobeying Euro-Canadian patriarchal constructs, then let us continue to develop terms and concepts that fit our current world in all its richness. Let us express the erotic! Miranda says that "for Indian women to express the erotic is almost as frightening to America as if the skeletal witnesses in anthropology departments and national museums had suddenly risen from their boxes and begun to testify" (3).

I constantly assert that moontime is a powerful state for women. However, I continue to witness Indigenous males distort this idea of power; they believe moontime has negative effects that do not support or add to the power of ceremony. Women are so powerful in their moontime, I have been told, that their power detracts from the ceremony. The spirits and ancestors that are called to a ceremony will not attend the pipe, sacred bundle, or sacred objects; they are attracted to the power of the blood from the menstruating woman. Prayers cannot be answered, as the spirits are distracted by the overwhelming power of menstrual blood. Distorted moontime perspectives have varying restrictions and consequences. These range from the desecration of a sacred object by the mere viewing of said object by a menstruating woman, to the prohibition on women entering a building where a ceremony is being held.

During a meeting with provincial government officials, university staff (including me), and community members from several First Nations communities, I was ordered by an Elder to leave a four-storey office building[98].A pipe ceremony was about to begin. While it was difficult to imagine that I was the sole menstruating woman in the busy office building, I acquiesced to the demand. As I sat in my car, LaRocque's critique of tradition came to mind,

[98] Oskâpew says, "You might wonder how the Elder knew about my moontime? I was standing in the hallway outside the room that the ceremony would take place. When asked to come in and join the ceremony, I said I could not at this time. In my experience, this subtle wording is enough for the ceremonialists to realize that a woman has her moontime. Nothing more is usually said. But, the Elder continued and asked if I had my moontime, I said yes and then banished from the building."

and I asked myself, "To what extent is tradition liberating to us as women? Wherein lie our sources of empowerment?" (14). Nowhere in this scenario was I respected or honoured. Often, just the threat of moontime is enough to restrict women from participating in and/or celebrating ceremonies. The removal of a woman during her moontime from a four-storey building due to the possibility of the desecration of a ceremony is deeply disturbing. I argue that the insidious nature of colonialism alters and denigrates the erotic, our traditions and ceremonies. To embrace the erotic fully, Indigenous peoples must consider the ways in which colonialism distorts our traditions and produces anti-erotic tendencies.

The anti-erotic reproduces narrow colonial images of Indigenous women and men, and these images continue to perpetuate sexual violence against vulnerable Indigenous populations (women, children, and Native gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and Two-Spirit identities). The following is an example of how Indigenous people internalize Euro-Christian attitudes of shame and self-loathing of our bodies and weaken our balance with cultural traditions. We now speak the colonizer's language fluently and we are skilled at turning it against our women. For example, the RCMP currently have a website outlining a "Native Spirituality Guidebook" that contains troubling ideas surrounding the moontime of women.

This guidebook was created for the RCMP by a group of Elders to help police officers understand Native ceremonies and belief systems. The guide states that if a (sacred object) bundle must be searched, a male officer should conduct the search, just in case a female officer is menstruating. The guide states, "This is due to the belief that women, during their 'moon time', are spiritually far more powerful than men and the simple act of viewing the items will cause them to be desecrated" (11). Think about the English term *desecrate* for a brief moment. A powerful word. The definition of desecrate is "to damage (a holy place or object)" or "to treat (a holy place or object) with disrespect" (Merriam-Webster). As these enforcements of cultural "traditions" prove, Indigenous peoples have

not been vigilant in our recall of tradition.

Embodied Knowledge #4 – WWOS con't

As part of the National Collective of WWOS, I travelled with my sisters to Regina to deliver the sacred bundle and experienced "reverse traditionism" or distorted traditionism with a male Elder. Since then, my WWOS sisters have had several discussions with each other and with our Elder, Maria Campbell. We have prayed, sweated, and made offerings in ceremony in order to understand our roles and responsibilities to the WWOS bundle's travels for the next seven years. I have travelled with the bundle to Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Whitehorse, K'omoks and Red Deer. The powers of ceremony have empowered my sisters and me, and clarified our roles and responsibilities to the WWOS bundle. While we are very respectful of local protocols, our Elder has helped us understand that the protocol for the bundle stays unchanged, despite the geographical terrain we are on. ONLY my sisters on the National Collective or the grandmothers of the territory handle the Eagle staffs. If invited to a specific territory, the bundle is treated like a guest and is still bound to its own protocols and not the protocols of the territory. Communities are given a guideline for inviting the bundle, and must agree to the terms. Sometimes communities choose not to host the bundle due to the conflicting protocols of their Elders. While the community may want to have the WWOS memorial there, we cannot commit if asked to abide by conflicting protocols. These are always difficult discussions.

Emma LaRocque goes on to say, "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" (35).

> *Since the first installation in Edmonton, our WWOS Collective has grown stronger and our interconnectedness is the foundation of our strength. We are in constant communication to discuss our roles and responsibilities to the bundle. We realize that as we move forward, we must continue to adapt and adjust to the needs of the bundle and to our communities.*

People and communities that have survived and thrived have constantly adapted and shifted to suit the changing situations and environment in which they find themselves. As we return to Tarsa and Unahi, remember these stories and experiences I have shared with you. Through *Kynship,* Justice exposes the potential challenges that arise as new values, traditions and religious practices displace old ones.

After having been outcast by her family 26 years ago, Unahi never thought that she would return. Unbeknownst to her other sisters, Geth summons Unahi back to Red Cedar Town. Geth is the only one of Unahi's five sisters who still loves and respects Unahi, and Geth believes that Unahi is the only one who can help Tarsa. Everyone is shocked when Unahi arrives, and she is greeted with disdain: "Sit down, Unahi, but let's not pretend that you're welcome here" (22) and "You don't belong here! Your ways will bring nothing but pain and suffering to us again, to the entire town" (23). Unahi's unwelcome presence imitates the division many Indigenous tribes experience as new values displace or devalue former modes of thinking and ways of being. The concept of kinship becomes irrelevant to all but one of Unahi's sisters. Unahi's relatives' violent rejection and fear-laden words reflect how Indigenous peoples often felt conflicted when faced with opposing views on spirituality and religion. The sublimation of traditions, cultures, and worldviews affects not only Indigenous women, but also our ceremonies.

I felt a deep sadness when I learned of the following story about an Elder named Mianscum. Although I live thousands of kilometres away, this story moved me, and I ruminated about the powerful forces that produced this rejection of Nehiyawak ceremonies.

Mianscum's story relates to Unahi's struggle, as they are both in the midst of vast changes. Valerie Taliman writes about the incident in *Indian Country Today*. In October of 2010, an Elder by the name of Redfern Mianscum built a sweat lodge for his friend, Wapachee, in her backyard. They hoped that the traditional ceremonies would help Wapachee and her family as they had helped and healed Mianscum years ago when he struggled with addictions (Taliman). Little did he know that this would set off a chain of events that would shine a national spotlight on the intergenerational effects of church oppression and the internalized Christian values of this oppression. After three months of community discussion on the matter of whether the sweat lodge was permissible, the Ouje-Bougoumou band council deliberated on the subject and concluded:

> The Elders envisioned a comfortable home and future for Ouje-Bougoumou … and this vision did not include any form of native spirituality or practices such as sweat lodge, pow wow or other form of adopted traditional practices from other First Nations. (Taliman)

Then on October 29, the council adopted this surprising resolution:

> [T]he Council hereby declares that the sweat lodge, along with any form of Native Spirituality Practices such as powwows, rain dances, etc., do not conform with the traditional practices and teachings of our elders. The Council hereby unanimously declares that the sweat lodge is to be dismantled and removed, and that all sweat lodge practices in the community immediately cease. Ouje-Bougoumou will continue to uphold its faith in and guidance by God. (Taliman)

Other James Bay Cree communities and Nehiyawak people across Turtle Island were as shocked as Mianscum at this turn of events. The banning of sweat lodge ceremonies and all traditional Native spiritual practices on the reserve epitomized the internalized values wrought by Christianity. These actions and reactions demonstrate the complex history

between Indigenous peoples and settler society, as well as the continued role of Christian churches in our communities. *Kynship* provides the reader with an easily recognizable scenario, a mirror of North America's savage history as churches and missionary societies set out to "civilize" the Indigenous population through religion and Christianity.

I have shared a story about Redfern Mianscum. How does Justice's characters of Unahi and Tarsa relate to the reality of Mianscum? Further, how do these worlds relate to yours? Take some time to reflect on the relationship between these stories.

In the current scene we are discussing from *Kynship*, we find Unahi returning to her childhood town of Red Cedar. Despite the rejection of her other sisters, kinship ties to Geth and Tarsa compel Unahi to return to her homeland. She must confront her Celestial sisters, who are the Cedar Branch mothers, to collect, and hopefully help, Tarsa. Unahi is greeted with animosity and fear: "'Witchery!' Ivida hissed through clenched teeth.'" (23). In *Kynship*, the Celestials, with the familiar religious zeal of Christian and Jesuit missionaries, have inculcated their values to assimilate the Indigenous population. Justice positions Unahi as an Elder or Kehteyak, and, like Redfern Mianscum of the present day, she struggles to hold to deep spiritual values and ceremonies. In a community petition demanding the sweat lodge be torn down, 130 members of Mianscum's James Bay Community wrote:

> We will not even allow any person to come into our community to bring these kinds of practices to confuse our youth … We have raised them with the Word of God and we will continue to do so. They know the difference between the World of God and spiritual practices. (Taliman)

The James Bay Community rejected Mianscum's ceremonies and spiritual teachings, and this parallels Tarsa's rejection of the bloodsong call and Deep Green. This rejection painfully

mirrors the purging of "native spirituality practices" exemplified in the James Bay Cree incident. With the scene of Tarsa's initial rejection of the Deep Green, Justice reflects a deep-rooted, internalized oppression within the colonized self. The rejection of kinship and interconnectedness and application of individualistic and hierarchical values results in the destitution of the erotic. Tarsa's struggle with the relentless call of the bloodsong reflects modern society's negative beliefs about menstruation (also known as "the curse," remember), and thus, reader, it is easy to see how everyone fails to see the power of moontime. As I write this, I wonder if my moontime beliefs will bring about the same animosity.But then I realize that I don't care. My responsibility to learn more about the power of moontime and to share this knowledge is more compelling than any backlash I may receive -

but I will keep paskwâwihkwaskwa in my shoes, just in case.[99]

JUSTICE SPEAKS

These passages set the tone for Daniel Heath Justice's entire trilogy, in which I see parallels drawn between the Celestials colonizing the Indigenous population of Everland and the ongoing colonizing process in North America. The following story is the result of an interview with Daniel Heath Justice:

> I had the pleasure of spending half the afternoon on a cold January day in the presence of Cherokee author Daniel Heath Justice. After a carnivorous lunch at Pampa and full of enough meat to choke a wolf,[100] I was able to sit with him and talk about the Kynship trilogy and the relationship between these books and its characters and his Cherokee background.

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[99] Oskâpew says, "I am told that the practice of putting paskwâwihkwaskwa in your moccasins or shoes protects you from anything harming your spirit. For me, I feel happy, safe, and loved when I keep paskwâwihkwaskwa on my person."

[100] Oskâpew says, "In case you were wondering, an average grey wolf can eat up to 10 kgs of meat in one sitting (International Wolf Center). We did not eat that much, but it was close."

My question concerned the use of menstruating warrior women, and I wondered whether this was a part of his Cherokee traditions. He said absolutely, that he did draw upon some of the Cherokee and Southeastern Mississippi tradition. Daniel related the Cherokee story of Stonejacket as the muse for his character, Wears-Stones-For-Skin.

Daniel relates, "The story is, so we have a few ogre-like cannibal creatures and one of them is a hideous witch woman called Spearfinger and another one is her relative called Stonejacket. And they are cannibal monsters, predators, and can take the form of banal people and then they reveal themselves as hideous monsters. Stonejacket is an ogre with stones embedded in his skin; the stone is so hard that weapons can't pierce it. And a medicine man figures out how to defeat him. Stonejacket is on his way to a village to raid it and the medicine man puts seven menstruating women on the path in Stonejacket's way, and every time he passes one of these women he makes some comment about how sick the woman is or how ill she is due to her smell. But he gets progressively weaker and then, when he reaches the last woman, he collapses and the male warriors from the community pin him down with sourwood stakes and kill him. And then his body is burned, and as he burns he sings the medicine songs we continue to use to this day. So that would be the story of Stonejacket roughly." (Justice 2012)

I asked Justice how he felt about delving using the world of Cherokee women and whether he felt any trepidation as a male storyteller utilizing female sexuality in his story. He says:

> I was nervous! And I didn't want to necessarily write about something that might not be appropriate and I was nervous about that. I showed it to a number of women in my family and none of them had a problem with that. So I said okay, and

> even some of them said, "Hey, that's kinda cool," so I said yeah, good. Let's include it in the story. (Justice 2012)

The nervousness that Justice feels can be understood through his relationships and obligations to his family and to the Cherokee nation. Justice is accountable to his community, and he bears the responsibility to be a good member of it. As he invokes his Cherokee ways of being in the world, his role as a tribal member extends into his professional domain as well. He practices relational accountability and thereby demonstrates a deep respect for the oral narratives of Cherokee women. In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King (also Cherokee) warns, "For once a story is told, it cannot be taken back. Once told, it is loose in the world. So you have to be careful with the stories you tell" (10). The concept that once stories are told, they can't be taken back reveals why Indigenous people often express cautiousness regarding how stories are told, when they are told, and by whom. For example, many Nehiyawak refrain from telling stories about Wisakejack when the snow has left the ground. It is only in winter, when the spirits are resting, that these stories are told. To a non-Indigenous writer, the genre of fantasy/sci-fi literature is a zone in which there are fewer rules and restrictions regarding historical accuracy. While *Kynship* is fantasy/sci-fi literature, Justice's tribal connection binds him to another level of attention and consideration. His accountability as a Cherokee storyteller motivates Justice to get the approval of female family members before he shares his version of the story of Stonejacket. In my writing of *Power in My Blood*, I, too, remain accountable and "careful with the stories I tell" (10) as a sister of WWOS.

In comparison to Justice's recounted interview version of Stonejacket, I notice slight differences about the women and the character Wears-Stones-For-Skin in *Kynship*. I consider that perhaps Justice's version of the Stonejacket story in our interview was somewhat shortened. But I can't help but wonder if Justice purposefully reimagined the paradigm of moontime. The leader of the attack on Stonejacket is a medicine man who

employs menstruating women, seen as ill or sick, to weaken Stonejacket. Male warriors are then sent in to kill the diminished creature. This version has the women as minor characters whose menstrual cycle is so contaminating and their smell so repulsive that it sickens the great beast to the point of death.

In the *Kynship* version, the warriors are women, belonging to the Redthorn warrior society. Their moontime is their power; it has no scent, and Wears-Stones-For-Skin smells nothing. He is able to smell the fear of the he-Kyn, but smells nothing on the menstruating women. The he-Kyn are afraid of Wears-Stones-For-Skin, and they hang back; they stay on the cliff above, hurling rocks and boulders onto the creature. The Redthorn warriors, synchronized by the moon, are on the front line. The only ones who can ultimately defeat the monster are the female warriors. The he-Kyn are the minor characters. *Kynship* reveals women and their moontime as a positive strength and power. Why does Justice make changes to the Stonejacket story? To understand this remaking of story, I turn to Paula Gunn Allen, who suggests that "[a]ll storytellers shape these traditional and historical facts within the aesthetic matrices to form significances that carry us beyond (while including) the political, the historical, the sociological, or the psychological" (9).

Justice retains the main outcome of the story of Stonejacket, but he changes one critical element. He establishes moontime as a symbol of positive woman power. He is representing a "reimagined" time, prior to contact, when menstrual blood was not seen as a pollutant or a sickness. Allen claims that storytelling shapes and moulds our histories and traditions to embody, inform and work with our current circumstances. Seemingly a small detail, this change is significant. Justice maintains that moontime is indeed powerful, but in *Kynship* he disrupts colonial settler discourse about menstruation and compels readers to view women's moontime in a different light.

Indigenous authors adding to the corpus of non-fiction are integrating teachings and stories from their own unique cultural traditions. Paula Gunn Allen asserts that "Native

writers write out of tribal traditions, and into them" (5). Indigenous literature and art on the subject of moontime as a positive manifestation of the power and strength of women are rare. I hope *Power in My Blood* will add to this small corpus and hope to see more work done that celebrates our female sexuality and power. Our circumstances as Indigenous women and Indigenous nations demand it, and our future generations depend on it. The access point comes through stories, and follows tribal literary tradition. Specifically, Allen suggests:

> The aesthetic imperative requires that new experiences be woven into existing traditions in order for personal experience to be transmuted into communal experience; that is, so we can understand how today's events harmonize with communal consciousness. (6)

Both Boyden and Justice successfully step outside the normative positioning of women's moontime, and with their characters, challenge the essentialization of motherhood, life-giving, and fertility; they offer us an alternative perspective.

SCENE TWO – GENDERFUL

As chapter three demonstrates, a character like Niska serves as a symbolic representation of the embodiment of Indigenous erotics. Within *Kynship* – particularly the characters of Tarsa, Averlyn, and Fa'alik – I share with you, reader, a more ambiguous space of gender and sexuality. A space that advances the field of Indigenous erotics, an eroticanalysis that "return[s] with new knowledge and fresh interpretation" (Teuton 196). I demonstrate that Justice creates a fresh interpretation of a world that celebrates multiple genders. This Cherokee paradigm has the potential to unsettle the colonial male/female dichotomy and push forth a wider understanding of gender.

Kynship is much more than a fantasy/sci-fi trilogy; it is deeply complex narrative, and it challenges the normative, critiques common sense, and offers up alternative realities of

sexuality and gender. Justice integrates Cherokee beliefs regarding third and fourth genders into the characters of Everland to discuss the acceptance of genderful folk and diverse sexualities within many Indigenous societies. Our corporeal sovereignty is dependent not only upon the balance of both male and female, but the acceptance and celebration of everything in between. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to open up the dichotomy of male/female gender and their "matching" roles and responsibilities. We must understand gender not as two silos standing apart, but as a spectrum, as complementary and constantly deterritorializing and reterritorializing. Several characters in Justice's book dispel the heteropatriarchal normative and embody more ambiguous traits of gender, sexuality and sexual identity; these include the zhe-Kyns, Fa'alik and Averyn the Healer, and finally the warrior, Tarsa She-Breaks-the-Spear. This section examines how Justice's characters challenge heteropatriarchal oppression and work to transform deeply ingrained colonial ideals of gender and sexuality. With *Kynship*, Justice has begun to "reimagine the community values" (171) that Suzack points out contemporary Indigenous writers must confront. Her essay

> [a]rgues for the importance of gender identity to a reading of community relations and tribal histories, and it proposes that contemporary creative writers and community activists, such as Winona La Duke, offer a progressive vision for reimagining community values and inherited community relationships through Indigenous feminist practice. (171)

Indigenous gender and sexual identities are deeply complex, and neither necessarily informs the other – meaning your gender does not define your sexual identity, nor does your sexual identity define your gender. We must also be circumspect about the widely held beliefs surrounding the roles and responsibilities attached to gender or sexuality. With characters like Fa'alik, Justice offers a different vision of gender. We first meet Fa'alik after Tarsa leads the battle that kills the Stoneskin, and Tarsa is initiated into the Warrior society:

> Tarsa's stomach clenched at the thought, but her rising nervousness was broken as the zhe-Kyn, pox-scarred Fa'alik, stepped toward the Stoneskin's body with a burning cedar branch. The zhe-Kyn straddled the male and female worlds in all things, garbed in blouse and skirt, head tattooed and shaven but for a braided topknot, moving between the blood of war and the blood of moon without fear. (18)

This passage summons up two exciting and important elements to discuss; the first is the description of Fa'alik, who "straddled the male and female worlds in all things"; this character is related to the contemporary term "Two-Spirit." The second is the realm that Fa'alik inhabits, "moving between the blood of war and the blood of moon." "Two-Spirit" is a recently coined term, coined in the '90s and referring to Indigenous people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual or queer (or some combination thereof). Like Fa'alik, the term "Two-Spirited" also makes reference to an Indigenous person who embodies both male and female spirits. There is no consensus or agreement on how the term is applied or how it may be used, and many Indigenous people refuse this label as much as any other. The significant thing to remember here, intrepid reader, is that people have the right to choose and self-identify however they please. This authority over oneself contradicts our current colonial values, in which gender "assignment" is determined by the physical geography of one's physiology – meaning if you are born with a body that has a penis, then you are automatically assigned to the male sex and are expected to assume all the roles and responsibilities that are ascribed to the male sex. This is vastly different from many Indigenous societies, which believe that, as historian and author of *More Sin Than Pleasure* Bobbalee Ann Shuler says, "One's gender classification was not determined on the basis of sexual activity [or body parts] but rather by the person's spirit, character and desire, because the body is recognized as a temporary state and houses the soul-spirit" (34).

Let us explore some of the intriguing aspects of Indigenous people that inspire characters like Fa'alik. Straddling the worlds of both female and male, Fa'alik represents a person who

has all masculine and feminine areas of activity and expressions open to them. While this freedom to express and self-identify one's gender and sexuality is significant, there are still connected responsibilities. In fact, many Indigenous people with this male/female identity were traditionally seen as having special roles beyond those of an average tribe member. They often held high positions as healers, medicine people, and ceremonial people. As scholar of politics and gender at the University of Washington Sabine Lang points out in *Men as Women, Women as Men*, "They [persons who embody both male/female sides] know everything – that is, they 'know' the masculine and feminine equally, on the basis of their dual sexuality, which alone enables them to fulfill both roles in the first place" (72). For many Indigenous societies, it was seen as a gift to have the ability to occupy both worlds, and as such, Two-Spirited people were thought to bring good luck and health to any household they inhabited.

Justice invokes Cherokee understandings of female warriors and Cherokee "Ghigau women" or "Beloved Woman[101]" when he describes Fa'alik as "moving between the blood of war and the blood of moon without fear." Take for example, in the Plains cultures of warrior women, the Cherokee woman warrior Nan'yehi (later known as Nancy Ward). She bled monthly *and* she bled in battle as well. Warriors like Nan'yehi were women who had achieved the highest of honours within their Cherokee tribe (Suzack et al. 46). Similarly, Nehiyawak, Crow, Blackfoot, and other Plains tribes also had women who went to war regularly. Lang adds:

> To want to make one's mark in the masculine prestige domain of warfare and raiding was regarded as thoroughly honourable for women, and not at all unseemly; their success demonstrated the power of their medicine and their personal bravery. (278)

[101] Oskâpew says, "Cherokee Beloved Women or Ghigau were influential women due to their bravey and leadership abilities."

Nan'yehi, Running Eagle (Crow), and another Running Eagle (Piegan) proved themselves in war and were initiated into men's war councils and were given the names of men (Lang 276–278). Regardless of gender, any tribe member who displayed courage or strength in battle were honoured and respected for the skills they brought to the tribe. I suggest that the gender fluidity seen in Fa'alik is a characteristic that stems from Justice's reimagining and remaking of Cherokee women warriors.

I want to enrich our understanding on Indigenous gender fluidity further by integrating a brief discourse on Norval Morrisseau and his series of erotica paintings. Early on in my thesis, I indicated that we would explore some of the visual erotic art of Indigenous artists. Although Shawn Hunt's *Hotbox* certainly engages optical erotic aesthetics and serves as a valuable visual example of Indigenous sensualities, I promised to share the Indigenous erotic expressions of Morrisseau as well. The gender variability and fluidity in *Kynship* relates to, and reminds me of, Morrisseau's attitude to socially constructed labels of gender and sexuality. Michelle McGeough (member of the Métis Nation of Alberta), in her article "Norval Morrisseau and the Erotic," suggests that Morrisseau was reluctant to identify his sexual or gender identity within Western constructs, rejecting labels of queer, straight, bi-sexual, male, or female (70). I propose that Morrisseau's refusal to categorize, classify, and demarcate his sexuality and gender is manifested within his erotica series. That is, Morrisseau and his erotica series disrupt the heteropatriarchal normative and open up the conversation on Indigenous understandings of sexuality, gender, and sexual relationships. The following Morrisseau painting, circa 1980, is titled "Erotic Couple," and is one of many paintings in his erotica series.

Inspired by the stories that he heard as a child, Morrisseau's paintings reflect his Anishnaabek worldviews.

Let your eyes rest on the *Erotic Couple* for a few minutes. I want you to reflect on the following: How does it make you feel? Speak out loud what you "see" in the painting (without trying to analyze). Feel the painting in your mind. I want you to write two things. First, briefly describe how the painting makes you feel. Second, what relationship do you see the *Erotic Couple* having, keeping in mind our discussion on gender fluidity?

Before we discuss the relationship between gender fluidity exhibited in *Kynship* and the appearance of *Erotic Couple*, I want to share a brief erotic interlude with the painting.

Shades of turquoise dominate the *Erotic Couple* painting. The shadows of blue on the two beings propose the idea they are bathed in the natural light of the moon, a suggestion that they may be in a night ceremony. One being is entirely in blue chromatics, and the other has brown highlights the colour of Anishnaabe flesh. Is there meaning in this difference? As Morrisseau often used the colour blue to denote spiritual beings, we can interpret the all-blue being as a spirit being, while the one with brown highlights is human. It is difficult to discern whether the spirit being's chest is the muscular chest of a man or the breasts of a woman. Besides the penis of the man, neither of the beings has any other discerning gender features. The being with flesh-coloured parts and the commanding penis is a human male. The imposingly large penis centralizes our gaze. Both beings face the centre; the man focuses on his penis, while the spiritual being watches the man. Their connection is palpable. Electric. The penis clearly occupies the minds of the beings and monopolizes the scene. You may not realize it, reader, but the centralization of the giant penis is a sensual manipulation by Morrisseau. His use of colour, form, and configuration controls your eyes. Your gaze is meant to be guided downwards, beginning at the tip of the penis, down the shaft to the testicles nestled within a mound of curling black pubic hair. The natural inclination of your eyes is then to follow the bodies upward, and then move to the vibrant yellow-green eyes.

When you unconsciously follow their gaze, you inevitably end up where you started.[102] Were your eyes as easily guided as mine, intrepid reader? While my eyes are on their circular adventure, I am also full of anticipation. The painting fascinates and holds viewers for many reasons. As with many of his erotic paintings, Morrisseau presents great tension within the *Erotic Couple*. For instance, in other paintings, Morrisseau often demonstrates tension and movement with rows of wiggly lines next to male and female genitalia. For *Erotic Couple,* the tension comes from the beings' lack of hands, arms, or legs. The erection engages the eyes of the beings, but they are both left without hands to guide, stroke, or give pleasure to each other. Perhaps there will be mouths involved? Viewers are left wondering how this scene will end. I hope you enjoy this tension too, intrepid reader, this "not-knowing-what-will-happen-next" part.

In this image, one flowing black line emerges from each of the beings' heads and connects in the centre with a flesh-coloured egg shape. The egg shape connects the beings and represents a meeting of the minds. Thick, curling black pubic hairs radiate from the scrotum and penis of the blue male and display masculine virility. In many of Morrisseau's erotic paintings, small black dots in or near genitalia often represents sperm and/or eggs and suggest fertility and procreation. This painting is devoid of these representations, which leads me to believe that the scene is not about procreation, but only about pleasure. While each viewer may have his or her own perceptions and readings about the gender of the spirit being (and of the entire painting, for that matter), I embrace the ambiguousness of gender presented by Morrisseau in *Erotic Couple.* Here's why:

Morrisseau's Anishnaabemowin beliefs understand gender variance as neither an unnatural nor natural form of expression – it simply is what it is. I see Morrisseau's refusal to label his sexuality as an assertion of his corporeal sovereignty. As well, Morrisseau's

[102]Oskapew says, "Skilled artists such as Morrisseau are able to manipulate a viewer's gaze with simple, strategically placed objects. For example, a viewer will inadvertently follow the gaze of the subject in the painting."

paintings from his erotica period also reveal the complex interrelationships among all living things. McGeough explained that for Morrisseau, sexuality and sexual relationships extended much farther than just heterosexual pairings. Morrisseau infuses his paintings with Anishnaabe legends, and reveals the couplings of spirits/men, spirits/women, spirits/spirits, men/men, animals/men, etc. (McGeough 63). His paintings reveal his tribal understandings of ceremony and spirituality through expressions of the body, gender, and sexuality. McGeough suggests that for Morrisseau, it was more meaningful to establish his identity with roots firmly planted in an Anishnaabe worldview than to conform to Western gender norms. She posits that Morrisseau

> bases much of his imagery on the legends and stories of the Anishnaabe people, stories meant not just to entertain but also to instruct the Anishnaabe on how to live. The stories are the Anishnaabe's truth, a truth in which sexuality and desire are only one aspect of a being. (70)

Gender fluidity within Justice's *Kynship* and Morrisseau's *Erotic Couple* come from tribal histories and memories converging with current beliefs about gender and sexuality. Sabine Lang argues that there are many genders within Native American cultures, as they have come to "realize and appreciate transformation, change, and ambiguity in the world at large, as well as [in] individuals" (78). While gender variability and changes in sex roles and responsibilities were very much accepted in traditional North American Indigenous cultures, there were still codes and structures within these variables related to relationships. David Newhouse states, "Within the realm of sex and sexuality, there were strict moral codes that defined sexual behaviour. These moral codes focused on the proper relationship between people, rather than on the prohibition of certain types of behaviour" (3). Many behaviours were accepted as long as the integrity of relationships and balance were maintained. Navajo people had members called nadles (who were seen as homosexuals by white anthropologists) who were a critical part of Navajo society. Mojave people had men who

acted as women (alyha) and women (hwame) who chose to act as a man does (Lang 47–55). Indigenous erotica, such as Morrisseau's erotica series, testifies to the sexual and gender diversity seen over and over again across Turtle Island.

Today, we live in a world where heteronormative patriarchy has become our standard paradigm. In *Queer Indigenous Theory,* Qwo-Li Driskill writes, "The normalizing and privileging of patriarchal heterosexuality and its gender and sexual expressions undermines the struggles for decolonization and sovereignty and buoys the powers of colonial governance" (19). Colonial domination requires the Indigenous population to *accept* and *self-regulate* a male-dominated hierarchy with strict gender codes and restrictions. Indigenous populations today normalize this oppressive patriarchal social structure into tribal life.

Think about any young children in your life right now. Do you have them in your mind's eye? Think about their toys, their clothing and their hair. Do these items match the societal expectations for their biological gender (short hair for cis boys and long for cis girls)? Do any step outside their gendered framework? We experience gendered restrictions on a daily basis, and some are more difficult to transcend than others. Do you transcend any gendered norms?

To circle back to the characters in *Kynship*, I feel I must introduce you to another significant genderful character in the novel. Averyn is a healer of Sheynadiwiin. Tarsa's travelling companion, Tobhi, has these thoughts upon first meeting the *Z*he-Kyn:

> Tobhi hadn't seen many zhe-Folk; the only such Tetawa he'd heard about was a much-loved healer who lived not far from his home settlement. Neither male nor female, nor truly separate from either, the zhe-Folk walked between the worlds; they had strength unmatched by other Folk and were honoured for it, at least among those who followed the Old Ways. Celestials tended to dislike the zhe-Kyn and other zhe-Folk, but their

> whisperings hadn't yet erased the place of the zhe in the Everland, though they'd done much to make the zhe-Folk less welcome in Sheynadiwiin. (208)

The use of pronouns like "zhe-Kyn," "hir[103]," and "zhe-Folk" emphasizes the Two-Spirit qualities of embodying both male and female spirits, and also steps away from the she/he terms that suggest a strict gender binary. Tobhi's thoughts reflect the presence of colonial values placed on the ambiguousness of our tribal sexualities and genders. In the same way in which "Celestials tended to dislike the zhe-Kyn and other zhe-Folk" (208), genderful Indigenous people past and present have also been "disliked." Today, Two-spirit and genderful people use pronouns such as "hir" and "zhe" to fill the gap between some of our present restrictive gender pronouns to reflect new collective cultural needs. As we work to reimagine of our own functions, roles, and responsibilities, we recreate our own "authenticity." Like Fa'alik, the character of Averyn reveals tribal gender diversity, supporting Brian Joseph Gilley's declaration that "[a]t one time in the history of Native America, mostly before European contact, sexual and gender diversity was an everyday aspect of life amongst most Indigenous peoples" (7).

As a child, Justice listened to many stories and accounts of his ancestors, and it seems to me that the female characters in *Kynship* have invariably been developed with the influence of the Cherokee stories of the Ghigau. Indeed, within Great Plains societies such as those of the Crow, Peigan, Blackfoot, Nehiyawak, Ktunaxa, Navajo, and Tlingit (Medicine 267), there have been examples of warrior women as well. These were not women who were seen as "deviant" within the eyes of their tribe. Their ability (or lack thereof) to bear children had no influence on their title. Rather, "such commingling permitted war and beloved women to move between the worlds of men and women and generated a phenomenal source of spiritual authority" (Donaldson 44).

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[103] Oskâpew says, "Driskill purposely chooses to to use the pronoun 'hir' as an alternate to 'him,' 'his,' or 'her.' Driskill also uses 'ze' to describe 'she' or 'he.'"

In fact, Medicine examines these warrior women in her article "Warrior Women: Sex Role Alternatives for Plains Indian Women" to demonstrate how many tribal societies did not adhere to strict rules about male/female gender roles. She argues that men could choose to take on the dress, behaviours, and activities associated with women without negative repercussions (268). Everyday tribal life separated masculine and feminine duties and roles, but accepted those women and men who stepped outside their typical gender roles and responsibilities. Overall, tribes were more concerned with their members contributing to the health and well-being of the tribe than with the regulation and enforcement of restrictive measures of gender and sexuality.

In the battle with Stoneskin, Tarsa and the she-Kyn warriors demonstrate their responsibility and loyalty to their tribe. The logics of the Indigenous erotic sees one's natural abilities and aptitudes determining how one would contribute and be accountable as a tribal member. The survival of the tribe was the central goal. As such, it was in the best interests of the tribe to access the skills and talents of each individual member. Those who showed an aptitude for specific traits were groomed and their abilities honed. These beliefs are revealed in *Kynship*, as we find Averyn being groomed at an early age for a very special place: "[T]he zhe-Folk walked between the worlds; they had strength unmatched by other Folk and were honoured for it" (208). Biological gender did not necessarily limit or confine a person to specific roles and responsibilities; this flexibility contributed to the greater well-being of the tribe. Beatrice Medicine shares examples both of women who were manly hearted women and men who participated in typically female roles among the Plains peoples. I agree that this erotic practice

> offered men and women opportunities for displaying cross-sex talents in socially approved ways, and in doing so, they were probably essential to the psychological well-being of peoples who lived in societies with highly dichotomized gender expectations. (Medicine 276)

While the gender roles and responsibilities may have been strict, there was flexibility regarding to which group you could belong. In this way, the elements of "agency" and "authority over oneself" in erotics operate well in *Kynship,* and are similar to Morrisseau's assertion of corporeal sovereignty through the incorporation of his Anishnaabe worldviews into his paintings.

REVISITING GENDER AND SEXUALITY PARADIGMS

Sifting through the collections of writings about sexuality in Indigenous cultures, I am frustrated not only by the incredible dearth of historical data, but by the covert biases stemming from the culture in which the investigator was trained. The investigation of sex and gender variances in Indigenous cultures demonstrates that many of the anthropological articles on the topic are based in a heritage of Western homophobia and missionary Christian indoctrination. It comes as no surprise to find that in 1975, the executive board of the American Anthropological Association voted "not to endorse anthropological research on homosexuality across national borders" (Williams 13). Although the resolution was later dissolved, this intolerance and condemnation of gender and sexual variation demonstrates an attitude that dates back to the first Spanish explorers' and conquistadors' chronicles and reports back to Spain. Any males exhibiting female characteristics were mistaken for homosexuals, because the Spanish and, later, other Europeans had little or no understanding that one's sexuality and spirituality were intricately connected in Indigenous American societies. Outsiders were uninterested in trying to understand a wider sexual and gender spectrum. Tribal members who were male but who took on the gender roles, duties, and obligations of females were known as *berdaches* (today considered a derogatory term). Often, berdaches had other special ceremonial responsibilities and were held in very high esteem. The first Spanish explorers, however, saw in them only rampant homosexuality paired with cross-dressing and religious fanaticism. When Cieza de Leon reported back to Spain in 1553 about the elevated status of the berdache, he wrote, "The devil held such

sway in this land that, not satisfied with making them fall into so great sin, he made them believe that this vice was a kind of holiness and religion" (136). Indeed, many genderful folk became spiritual leaders in ceremonies, and had vital positions within the tribe. They were seen as special not only due to how they dressed, their behaviour, and their occupations, but to the presence of their spiritual gifts as well. In this way we understand Justice's character Averyn and Boyden's Niska as healers:

> … the injuries would be grievous, and likely beyond the zhe-Kyn's strength to heal; hir gifts, hir gifts belonged more to the mending of the spirit. Although zhe could set broken bones, heal burns, and bind the common injuries of hearth and home, Averyn's greatest skills were with aching hearts and wounded minds. (108).

Justice weaves Averyn and other zhe-Kyn healers into the story of *Kynship,* and, in doing so, offers the idea that historically, Two-Spirit people were a crucial part of the healing circle. The "mending of the spirit" (108) indicates the significance of wholeness and integration within the body as well as the mind. Driskill states that today, Cherokee Two-Spirit people "Are looking to both archive and repertoire to 'restore what was lost' as well as to imagine and create a present and future" (110). Other scholars like Mark Rifkin challenge the legacy of colonial formulations of heteronormativity by examining how sovereignty is linked to contemporary articulations of tradition. In her article *Chairmen, Presidents, and Princesses: The Navajo Nation, Gender, and the Politics of Tradition* Navajo scholar Jennifer Denetale discusses her own challenges with tradition within her own nation of the Navajo people; she claims that "Navajo leaders, who are primarily men, reproduce Navajo nationalist ideology [in ways that] reinscribe gender roles based on Western concepts even as they claim they operate under traditional Navajo philosophy" (9). Western concepts like virtue are used to distort and manipulate Indigenous ways of thinking. Not only are Two-Spirit people (and others who do not fit neatly into a heterosexual, gender-conforming category) hoping to

reimagine a future that includes tribal understandings of sexuality and gender, but they also hope to be a part of the tribal circle once more.

In some of Morrisseau's erotic paintings, in Vera Wabegijig's poem about Coyote, and in the following excerpts from Cruz's narrative "Birth Song for Muin, in Red," we find examples of erotica that don't just cross gender boundaries but blur the lines separating human and animal sexual boundaries. In these poetic erotics, the character "young girl in boy skin" crosses realms of female/male, bear/human:

> Upon reaching this strange, new place, the young girl with this new boy skin is introduced to the most beautiful woman she has ever seen. This walloping mama Bear is voluptuous, with glittering claws and sizable teeth, as handsome as she is rocketing in breast … She realizes that she, too is a bear and that this is her family – more than anyone else has ever been. (67–68)

Living with the bears, she knows she is a human girl. Being raised as a human girl, "she knows she is also a bear boy," and, finally, "Her giant breasts soaked with his longing, Muini'skw[104] asks Muinji'j to accept the responsibility for his unique ability to see the soft space between women and men, bears and humans" (69). The bodies of bears, boys, men, girls, and women are constantly being reterritorialized and deterritorialized as they materialize, disappear, and reappear as something else. This fluidity and shape-changing marks the interconnections between humans and other-than-human beings. Both Morrisseau and Cruz's erotic images/words work soundly ignore labels, colonial fixtures of gender, identity, and sexuality. McGeough states that "Western notions regarding the body, gender and sexuality are often touted as expressing the innate nature of human beings; what Morrisseau [and other Indigenous erotica producers make] evident is how unstable these notions are" (83).

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[104] Oskapew says, "Muini'skw is Bear-Woman and Muini'skw names the transforming human girl as, Muinji'j or, Bear-Boy."

The sexual relationships we encounter within *Kynship* are diverse. Namsheke, as she was called prior to being given her warrior name, Tarsa'Deshae, enjoys sexual activities with both he- and she-Kyn:

> The voices faded as she became more aware of a different kind of fever that followed a run with the young he-Kyn of the town, or when she escaped her lessons and splashed in a hidden mountain pool with a few shapely she-Kyn. They all intrigued her, and she quickly learned from both what delightful mysteries could be found in the flesh. (44)

As this passage demonstrates, Tarsa's sexual experiences easily include two genders. Justice restores and reminds us of previous Cherokee sexual freedoms within Tarsa's experiences. In doing so, he advocates for a time when Indigenous societies enjoyed a profoundly different form of sexual expression and freedom to return to an egalitarian state. In this next scene, *Kynship* echoes Boyden's storyline of Niska and the trapper to demonstrate the rift that happened as the shadow of shame and guilt about sex infiltrated the Indigenous psyche. This is Tobhi's story of the Eld Green and how humans gained a foothold in Everland. Tobhi explains how Availle is the river-mother who gives life to "swimmers and mud-divers" (93). Availle falls in love with a human man called Kaantor who wandered into Everland by mistake; Tobhi says:

> "So for a time they were pretty happy. They spent most of their time rollin' in the furs – natural, of course, but somethin' them Humans seem to have all kinds of trouble with, gettin' it wrapped up with shame and guilt and meanness and such. Availle didn't know any of them ways, so she was happy, and she gave of herself freely." (93)

The "rollin' in the furs" points to the playful and natural way sex intertwined with everyday life. Just as Niska enjoyed herself in the beginning of her relationship with the

trapper, so too does Availle with her human, who "g[ives] herself freely" to Kaantor. Do you remember the violent scene in which Niska is betrayed in the church? For Niska, her mistake in trusting the trapper cost her little compared to what happened to Availle. Availle is also betrayed and violated by Kaantor, whose actions of greed and selfishness break down the barrier between the worlds of Men and Eld Green. Do you see the connections, intrepid reader? Did you notice how the betrayals of Availle and Niska happen in a sexual context, "wrapped up with shame and guilt and meanness and such" (93), and how sex is used as a weapon? Both Niska and Availle begin consensual sexual relationships with men whose motivations are vastly different from their own. Hateful and malicious, Kaantor and the trapper both use sex in an attempt to destroy the erotic. Kaantor seeks to invade and pillage Everland, while the trapper conspires to destroy Niska's power. The story of Availle and Kaantor remind readers of our present reality. While *Kynship* offers new characters and fantastical settings, it is still a familiar tale: that of one world crashing into the other, with devastating results.

The suppression of the erotic is a direct result of the guilt, shame, and secrecy connected to sex. The influences of the church and its Judeo-Christian ideologies regarding sex exalt procreativity and shame pleasure. Tobhi's words indicate as much when he says that the world of Men couldn't enjoy sex without "getting it wrapped up with shame and guilt and meanness and such" (93). Justice's and Boyden's characters enjoy sexual freedom, agency, and authority over themselves. Driskill invokes Justice[105] to discuss Cherokee sexuality; Justice states:

> Cherokees were incredibly gifted people, though not nasty about it. At the Peabody Museum there's a pipe bowl from a Cherokee townsite, with a man and woman having

[105] Oskâpew says, "Are you curious as to why I do not use the primary source in some quotations? Why do I not go directly to the source? For instance, why use Driskill's invocations of Justice, when I could just use Justice? Quite simply, I take pleasure in knowing that there are other conversations about the Indigenous erotic. This method demonstrates that a larger shared conversation on the Indigenous erotic includes scholars like Driskill, Rifkin, Denetdale, and others.

> sex, in explicit detail, with their genitalia pointed right at the smoker. So, somebody's getting a little thrill looking at that.… Early European accounts were horrified about how sexually free Cherokees were, that young Cherokee women had sex, out of wedlock, sometimes extra-wedlock.… I'm sorry, you can either deny your sexual desires and get in weird circumstances, or you can just admit the fact that we love sex. We're very sexual people.…" (Driskill 109)

The erotic pipe bowl is another example of the magic and joy of sexuality appreciated by Cherokee people in the past. Remember, intrepid reader, the urgings of Audre Lorde that we should embrace the erotic. Embrace all aspects of ourselves, and in doing so, live fuller and happier existences. Denying the erotic, as Justice points out, can lead to "weirdness," but even more so, the erotic is a crucial element to our survival as individuals and as strong Indigenous nations. The disruption and oppression of the erotic, within the worlds of Tarsa and Niska, demonstrates the reality of the assault on the erotic for Indigenous peoples' sovereignty.

SCENE THREE - KINSHIP AND CONNECTION TO THE LAND

Land, access to land, caretaking of land, and connection to land remain recurring themes within Indigenous erotics, as borne out within *Kynship*. Everland is described as the last bastion for Everland creatures, a place not yet overrun by Men. Do you recall, intrepid reader, how Justice's childhood fantasies helped him escape the cruel realities of his immediate world? Justice reiterates this in the following passage:

> The worlds I wanted to go were Faerie, the marvelous land of OZ, Krynn, Middle-earth – all the places where freaks and misfits fled to be heroes and magicians, where their essence and integrity were more important than who they failed to be, couldn't be … or refused to be. (2008 93–94)

It is no wonder that Everland becomes a sanctuary, a place of safety and a land of untouchable beauty. In his adolescent years, Justice found peace and sensuality in an alternative fantasy world where misfits and nonconformists thrived; as an adult, he creates Everland as an alternative narrative to the forcible removal of his ancestors from their homeland.[106] Everland is a place of hope and healing, where Justice applies Cherokee ideals to reimagine history. Justice connects to the historical trauma of the Cherokee Nation and equates the "Men" in *Kynship* to the white hordes that forced the Cherokee out of their homelands and onto reservations in Oklahoma. In one scene, Tobhi, Unahi, and Tarsa discuss the possibilities of the loss of their homeland. Tobhi declares, "'Them Kyn Shields is gettin' completely out of hand. They're even talkin' 'bout givin' up the Everland and movin' away to some forsaken place in the lands of Men'" (74). Justice uses this fantasy narrative not only to capture the breadth of loss of the Cherokee's homeland, but also to retell a painful event from a Cherokee perspective. "Surrender the Everland? Tarsa wanted to laugh, too, but Tobhi's grim face silenced her. It was an absurd notion" (75).

Justice's "retelling" of history through Tobhi's conversation with Tarsa and Unahi explores numerous possible conversations that may have happened among Cherokee people prior to their removal from their land. Justice reimagines tribal memories and experience and breaks the silences with the words of Tobhi, Unahi, and Tarsa. Driskill states that these conversations offer an alternative to a brutal past, while also recognizing that "the past lives in the very wounds that remain open in the present" (35). *Kynship* offers up new visions of the Cherokee past in an area long-dominated by settler voices. Driskill also relates that Justice tells these stories as part of his natural legacy of being Cherokee. Remember our discussions about accountability and relationship, reader? Driskill says that "the felt presence of a past that has been rendered silent in the 'literature of dominance'" (59).

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[106] Oskâpew says, "The Indian Removal Act of 1830, signed by President Andrew Jackson, forced many Indian Nations to relocate to Indian Territory in Oklahoma. In 1838, the Cherokee were evicted from their ancestral lands and forced to march 800 miles west to Oklahoma. This journey became known as the Trail of Tears (www.cherokee.org)."

Which means there is inherent responsibility for Indigenous peoples to recognize how the past influences our current states.

Similar to WWOS bundle, Indigenous sovereignty is *not entirely* based on the control or ownership of anything – of sacred items or land and territory. Sovereignty, then, is founded on a relationship *to specific land* and an accountability to "all our relations." Patricia Monture-Angus writes about land as commodity and states:

> Sovereignty, when defined as my right to be responsible, … requires a relationship with territory (and not a relationship based on control of that territory)… What must be understood then is that the Aboriginal request to have our sovereignty respected is really a request to be responsible. I do not know of anywhere else in history where a group of people have had to fight so hard just to be responsible. (36)

With the connection of the Trail of Tears to Everland and the threat of genocide, Mark Rifkin states that Justice expresses a

> reparative mapping of processes of wounding through which people(s) have been subjected to the institutionalization of settler logics and geographies. Foregrounding such histories of injustice allows for consideration of how outlawed and erased ties to one's people and to their homeland(s) might live on as affect, as reserves of sensation unrealizable as a documentary or legal claim. (2012, 35)

The foregrounding of injustices in non-fiction narratives reflects such crimes as the Cherokees' removal from their land (and the discriminatory practices of residential schools, Indian Act policies as seen in *Three Day Road*), and indicates that Indigenous people are tied to the land. Justice's and Boyden's texts also establish that dispossession of land and removals from the land are intergenerational. Indigenous peoples' sensations of homeland, belonging, and kinship carry on generationally through storytelling and contemporary narratives such as *Kynship* and *Three Day Road*. As Justice's book title, *Kynship,* suggests,

the significance of kinship and of relationships is a critical aspect of Indigenous erotica. As already outlined, kinship is a network that extends far beyond the boundaries of the immediate heteronormative family (mother, father, daughter, brother, etc.); bloodline is not a prerequisite of kinship. *Kynship* reveals the complexities of kinship. Forced together, Tarsa and Unahi are bound by something stronger than blood, although Unahi is the sister to Tarsa's long-dead mother:

> The Kyn of Red Cedar Town were not as friendly to Wielders these days as they had once been. Her Branchfolk would be bound by kinship and still-strong traditions of hospitality to give her a pallet and a meal during her visit, but that would be the most she could expect. (21)

Kinship is recognized as an important tool for establishing the foundations of a relationship. Justice talks about relationships as the "ongoing processes of balanced rights and responsibilities that keep kinship going in a good way" (Womack et al. 148). Developing meaningful relationships guaranteed easier outcomes in instances in which difficult decisions were needed:

> Neranda missed the old social etiquette … in the old days, such a meeting would never have begun until each member of the gathering had engaged in conversation with the others. The process would sometimes take days, even weeks, but it was time well spent, as the representatives of all perspectives would come to know and respect one another's lives, strengths, and weaknesses. Conflicts were minimized by the intimacy of familiarity; the alliances and agreements that emerged were strengthened by everyone's mutual regard for one another. (98)

In her discussion on kinship, Julie Cruikshank refers to anthropologist John Borneman to relate the critical role of kinship today in Indigenous peoples' nationalism:

> Borneman suggests that to treat kinship as ahistorical, as though it were an evolutionary stage of social organization relegated to the past, is to render it apolitical at the very point where kinship asserts its importance most centrally – in modern nationalism. (21)

The significance of extended family connections (the ongoing collective and kinship) as a tool to strengthen our communities in the battle for sovereignty, land, and nationalism cannot be overstated. The legacy of disease, starvation, and genocide devastated Indigenous populations. Now, Indigenous nations battle the Canadian state to be recognized as nations. Do you need a contemporary example of the power of kinship, curious reader?

When I shared the story of WWOS Edmonton, I mentioned my role as Advisor to the Provost at the University of Alberta. While in this role, I also led a team involving the Government of Alberta and 15 different First Nations communities in Alberta to repatriate and rebury 29 members of the Sharphead Band. How these Sharphead people (half of whom were children) came into the university's possession is a long story, and one best kept for another time. What I want to emphasize to you is this: I attribute the success of this difficult and challenging endeavour to the power of kinship. Even after a long period of separation, generationally and geographically, the 15 diverse First Nations were able to put aside their vast differences to rebury their shared ancestors.

Kept in cardboard boxes, the remains had been locked away in University of Alberta storage since the early 1960s. The Sharphead Band had barely survived the devastation of disease and starvation, and their low population numbers (from three hundred to barely fifty people) gave the Canadian state an excuse to refuse to recognize the band as legitimate. This refusal to recognize, and thereby the denial of Indigenous nationhood, allowed the Canadian state to seize the band's traditional territory and sell it for settlement and development. The illegitimization of the Sharphead Band based strictly on population numbers devalued and underestimated their kinship ties. Denied official band status, the

surviving Sharphead members integrated into other communities in and around Alberta. The ones who didn't survive were buried on Sharphead traditional territory.[107] Almost 50 years later, on an unusually hot day, October 19, 2015, 15 communities put aside their differences and held Nehiyawak and Blackfoot ceremonies as 29 of their ancestors were finally laid to rest. I was a mix of emotions that day, simultaneously feeling

relief

at bodies surrendered to the earth with ceremony and song

deeply troubled, angry

at the thought of them starved, poisoned with disease, dispossessed of land
deprived of burial songs and ceremony for so many years

sad

as we moved your bones from the cardboard boxes to pine caskets, I sifted through the straw. I cried; I didn't know how small the bones of children's hands were.

happy

when an 87-year old Elder hugged me after the reburial. She held me tight and whispered in my ear, "I'm so happy; you did a good job, my girl."

I want this story to remind you of the resilience of Indigenous peoples and the power of kinship despite dispossession. Let us now return to *Kynship*, as Justice reminds us of the dispossession of land and kin:

> Whatever family she'd once known was now far away. Without sisters or brothers to look after her, she'd drifted in isolation, and, though Unahi was kind in her way, the older Wielder was often distant and impatient. (137)

[107] Oskâpew says, "Sharphead traditional territory is the area by Battle River near Ponoka, Alberta, approximately 500 metres from the recently renamed Queen Elizabeth II Highway."

Unahi drifted; she became isolated, and the qualities that would normally be associated with kinship and relationship – warmth, kindness, and compassion – began to fade. It is clear that the families in Everland needed to remain together in close proximity, as they relied upon each other in a communal setting, as shown here of the Tetawa people: they lived "in some of the adjoining cabins; they were the core of Spider Clan in the region. This was the common way of Tetawa settlements: families lived with one another or close by" (185). *Kynship* also invokes the idea of the wyr as a type of spirit language found within the bonds of kinship. The wyr reflects aspects of my story "Tante Ohci Kiya?" to explain kinship ties. Let me further articulate how we are tied with the land and remain connected to the sacred places of our ancestors. Kinship is not lost to Indigenous people without homeland and who have been dispossessed or displaced due to any number of colonial strategies. Rather, as stories like that of the Sharphead Band demonstrate and Justice explains, it is the narratives that are "embedded in the ancestral homelands of Indigenous memories and story" (Womack et al. 163) that connect us to the land. Tobhi say, "The wyr is the spirit-language of kinship, a part of you, of all the Folk and our land, and that means we have to respect it and give it care, to honour its strengths and also its weaknesses" (133). Further, I would suggest that our strength as a nation, our bonds, and our kinship ties are only as strong as the weakest link.

Kynship embodies the principles of "All My Relations," foregrounding relationships and kinship ties as a necessity for our survival as Indigenous nations. Countless ties have been lost due to the imposition of "nuclear" family pods and the destruction of extended family caused by residential school policies and the Sixties Scoop. We have been dispossessed of our land through the reserve system, and through outright removal policies. These erotic disconnections are felt deeply in all aspects of our lives, and these "lost relations" erode the protective, healing, and affirming powers inherent in the concept of "All My Relations."

There is a magic in Justice's world of Everland, a restorative power that comes about through the embodying of the erotic. An eroticanalysis becomes a process for the reclamation and reaffirmation of our erotic selves. Attaining sovereignty as nations will only happen if everyone – genderful, children, women, and men – have corporeal sovereignty. Erotic embodiment demands that we be accountable to ourselves to celebrate the joy of the physical, emotional, spiritual, and sensual; further to this, the Indigenous erotic demands that we remain accountable to "All My Relations."

How are you accountable? And to whom? Draw four circles radiating out from each other (like a bullseye or target). Who goes in the centre circle? Fill in the concentric spaces, with people to whom/things to which you feel most accountable nearest to the centre, radiating out to the people to whom /things to which you feel less so.

EKOSI MAKA[108]

My research explores a very simple question: "If this is my body, where are my stories?" It identifies that the absence of "the good parts"[109] from my family's Wisakejack adventures indicates that there were larger, more complex issues involved in the areas of sex, sexuality, and gender. Possession of Indigenous ancestral lands by settlers requires the assimilation and/or extermination of the Indigenous population. The genocidal policies and oppressive practices of colonial governments subjugate and colonize Indigenous bodies. This research searches out answers to end targeted, sexual, and gendered violence against Indigenous women, girls, and genderful folk. As I investigated strategies for corporeal sovereignty, I came full circle, returning once again to "the good parts" of our stories – the Indigenous erotic. My questions then became:

1. What potential is there in the practice of an eroticanalysis to reimagine and redefine our state of being?
2. What power can we gain from the erotic to achieve corporeal sovereignty?

My study also seeks to incorporate an Indigenous methodological and epistemological approach grounded in a Nehiyaw'iskwew perspective. The emerging results in *Power in My Blood* reveal more than the potential of erotic practice to attain corporeal sovereignty. In fact, this research journey has been structured with an Indigenous ethos (including foundational texts like Lightning's Maskikiw Mâmtonehicikan) and aligns with Robert Warrior's statement that Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies are exercises in

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[108] Oskâpew says, "The research methodology of *Power in My Blood* has strongly encouraged readers to synthesize the information from my research and knowledge from my narratives and integrate their own experiences and perspectives to come to their own conclusions. That being said, how do I then begin to make comments on the meaning of it all? I will present the findings and conclusion *as I have learned* through this process, with the caveat that readers may find their own conclusions quite different. I accept that readers bring their own knowledge and may synthesize information in their own unique ways. These conversations are most welcome, and I hope to have these discussions in the near future."

[109] Oskâpew says, "Honestly? If you don't know what the good parts are by now, then I haven't done my job."

"intellectual sovereignty."[110] *Power in My Blood* realizes decolonizing strategies of the mind *and* the body. My research methodological approach harmonizes with my research aspirations for corporeal sovereignty. I sought to examine Indigenous erotics and discovered it as powerful site of wholeness of being that holds the potential to redefine who we are as Indigenous peoples. The Indigenous erotic is the entire scope of our embodied and emotional, sensual, and sexual experiences, of our lives and identities. Within this realm, we discover and expand our capacities and our strength. We create the tools needed to transform corrupted or distorted views of our sexualities and genders into a new dialogue of nation-building. Expressions of Indigenous erotica have taken the reins from the colonizer to express *our* ideas, *our* thoughts, and *our* beliefs about *our* erotic selves. The erotic is embedded in the fabric of our lives; denying or suppressing our erotic selves leaves us open to being defined.

indeed, we have been defined by others.

Thus, chapter one outlined a strategy of inquiry and offered a theory *and* practice founded within my Nehiyaw'iskwew research method. The second chapter situated Indigenous erotics to share visual and written expressions of Indigenous erotica, and defined how an eroticanalysis critically engages with the rethinking and remapping of our beliefs about our Indigenous genders and sexualities. I applied my eroticanalysis to two strong characters, Niska and Tarsa, in chapters three and four respectively, to demonstrate the potential of the Indigenous erotic in an analysis of text. Niska and Tarsa, as well as the other erotic visuals and narratives cited in *Power in My Blood*, work to locate and celebrate the Indigenous erotic and to act as a medium for the actualization of the sovereignty of Indigenous bodies and a site for decolonization.

[110] Oskâpew says, "This is a term describing Indigenous scholars' approach to research that honours and respects specific cultural ways of being."

As an Indigenous scholar working on her thesis in two fields of academia – the Department of English and Film Studies and the Faculty of Native Studies – I have a unique opportunity to explore and establish a distinct Indigenous methodology and theoretical framework. My graduate research and writing in Native Studies are very interdisciplinary in nature, and the Department of English and Film Studies supports my expanding scope of inquiry. *Power in My Blood* engages and investigates relevant intersections of colonialism, gender, authenticity, sovereignty, sexuality, and race.

This research process also reveals the gravity of careful and thorough research, particularly within the Indigenous realm. Early on, I noticed that many scholars like Womack would warn of the dangers of creating an autonomous theoretical framework for a non-autonomous culture. Understanding the danger in the creation of a pan-Indian paradigm with "reductive claims" and "universalized characteristics" (367), I kept my Kehteyak teachings and lessons close. I present *Power in My Blood* with humility, and I hope I have been careful enough not to present any "universal characteristics" of Indigeneity.

Encouraged to deviate from a conventional or disembodied methodology, I had space and freedom to discover, embrace, and create an eroticanalytical framework. Additionally, *Power in My Blood* adds to already-existing erotic texts and visuals that acknowledge and celebrate the changing contours and reimagined sensual spaces of Indigenous peoples. Literary critics of Indigenous literature like Quentin Youngberg, for example, argue that an Indigenous writer like Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian) is "Queering the Native sphere at the same time that he continues to participate in his long-standing project of 'Indianing' the (white) literary sphere" (Youngberg73).

My Indigenous eroticanalysis involves a genre of literature and visuals that embrace the diversity and fluidity of Indigenous gender and sexuality as the new norm. The Indigenous erotic community unfixes misrepresentations and hypersexualized

stereotypes about Indigenous people. J. Edward Chamberlin, in a keynote address, relates:

> These are the tricks of the trade for singers and storytellers all over the world, including the poets and playwrights and prose writers we celebrate in our literary canons. We have developed a critical currency to account for this and to make it comfortable, but it is the *un*comfortability, the strangeness, that is crucial; it is the defamiliarization, the alienation, the incompleteness, the indeterminacy, the ungrammaticality that remind us that the belief and the knowledge that we embrace (or that embrace us) are always accompanied by doubt and that the literariness that we look for in a text is to be found in the strange ceremonies that certify beauty and truth and goodness. (66)

what I believe to be true

The Indigenous erotic challenges our collective literary comfort and embodies this "*un*comfortability" and "strangeness" (66) of which Chamberlin speaks. My Nehiyaw'iskwew perspective contributes to the corpus of what counts as authentic knowledge. *Power in My Blood* invokes and supports the creative elements contributed by authors and artists in provocative visions of growth, healing, and change. Indigenous erotic expressions have great potential to disrupt the heteropatriarchal normative, challenge long-held stereotypes of Indigenous sexualities, address the struggle for justice for oppressed Indigenous bodies, and create a space for self-determining representations.

what I believe to be true

Ceremony is as much a part of my epistemology as it is part of the erotic. Ceremony opens up the avenue for people to communicate better with each other, and is also a place for us to become closer to the cosmos. Smudging has been a guiding light to lead me back to – and ground me in – my ceremonial knowledge. I am awakened by the smell of paskwâwihkwaskwa and sweetgrass; my memories are flooded with knowing who I come from. Jo-Ann Episkenew relates the following words from Vera Manuel's play *Strength of Indian Women*, and they encourage me. The passage invites me to remember my ancestors, my grandma, my aunties and mother – to recall the security and safety of my cultural ceremonies through their hands and voices:

> "I knew who I was when she would light up the juniper and guide my tiny hands over the smoke, pulling it up over my hair, across my heart, and down the rest of my body. She would turn me in a circle, always to the right, and she would tell me that the Creator gave me as a special gift to her, to watch over for a time. That, at that time, I was the most perfect, and precious being, there was no doubt. I believed that with all my heart."[111]

Indigenous erotics is a set of beliefs and concepts that, when visualized together, become a source of power for decolonization; Indigenous erotica are visual and written expressions manifested through the erotic. Listing the five elements of reimaginings, corporeal sovereignty, kinship, gender, and the ongoing collective does not – in any way - imply that Indigenous erotica is limited to these concepts. Rather, these strong patterns emerged organically from my research texts, and provide me with a healthy scope of enquiry for my thesis.

what I believe to be true

[111] Oskâpew says, "The quotation finishes with, 'What I seen [sic] in that school shocked me into silence, and disbelief in everything that was good' "(172).

The continued use of powerful characters like Niska and Tarsa has the potential to disrupt and challenge current heteropatriarchal normative discourse. Without action, without expression, we remain complacent with the dominating logic of heteropatriarchy. These narratives are not representations of resistance writing or even post-colonial writing; rather, they are an emerging paradigm of stories and characters infused with ambiguity and inexplicability. They are stories designed to dodge clarification and avoid definitive explanations, cast off stereotypes and challenge conventional analysis. As I have argued in *Power in My Blood*, many other Indigenous scholars, such as Emma LaRocque, Chris Finley, Mark Rifkin, Daniel Heath Justice, Qwo-Li Driskill, and Jennifer Denetdale (Navajo), also encourage the hearty critique of Indigenous cultural traditions and the process that naturalizes the heteropatriarchal normative into the customs and traditions of Indigenous people. Denetdale argues, "While it is necessary for Native scholars to call upon the intellectual community to support and preserve Indigenous sovereignty, it is crucial that we also recognize how history has transformed traditions, and that we be critical about the ways tradition is claimed and for what purpose" (20-21).

The call for the transformation and recentring of Indigenous beliefs, values, and worldviews echoes throughout many Indigenous nations. Early generations of revolutionary Indigenous authors and activists are said to have "transformed our understanding of who we are and shifted how it was possible to imagine ourselves" (Driskill 2). These in turn have sparked a generation of Indigenous writers, artists, and activists such as Rebecca Belmore, Shawn Hunt, Vera Wabegijig, Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, Sherman Alexie, Gregory Scofield, and Marilyn Dumont. The discourse on Indigenous literature continues to shift and grow. Indigenous scholars continue to challenge attempts that consolidate theoretical frameworks of authenticity and autonomy. Craig Womack argues that "[t]here is no independent theoretical framework that can be built upon an autonomous tribal culture because neither exists, that is, neither an autonomous theory nor an autonomous culture" (378). As *Power*

in My Blood demonstrates, the identification of similar attributes of Indigeneity may help to construct and form a complex theoretical framework (such as an eroticanalysis), but the attributes themselves are open to removal, additions, and changes through the continuous dialogue of Indigenous scholars.

An eroticanalysis operates as a framework – a method to interpret, a way to push forward and continue to search for new meanings and create new spaces in which to develop terms and concepts. As I continue to absorb and learn from the field of Indigenous erotics, I am hopeful that these perspectives may quite possibly be helpful in further diversifying the field of Indigenous literature. Chris Teuton, in his article "Applying Oral Concepts to Written Traditions," gives a working definition of theory to apply to American Indian literatures. Reading this list, I realized that the application of an eroticanalysis embodies the characteristics of an Indigenous theory. Teuton quotes Jonathan Culler's four main directives, and inserts one more:

> 1) Theory is interdisciplinary – discourse with effects outside an original discipline.
> 2) Theory is analytical and speculative – an attempt to work out what is involved in what we call sex or language or writing or meaning or the subject.
> 3) Theory is a critique of common sense, of concepts taken as natural.
> 4) Theory is reflexive, thinking about thinking, enquiry into the categories we use in making sense of things, in literature and in other discursive practices. (209)

Teuton goes on to add: 5) "Theory arises out of the dialectical relationship among artists, arts, critics, and Native communities" (209). Indigenous erotics works well with this working definition of theory and allows me as a Nehiyaw'iskwew to examine Justice's *Kynship* as an example of contemporary literature that negotiates the Indigenous space of gender identity, community, and kinship, and includes a rhizomatic framework that links sexuality to spirituality, kinship/relationship, ceremony, sovereignty, land, and stories; it also does so without generalization or essentialization. To quote Teuton, "Each reader brings his/her own viewpoint, experience, and unique skills to the task of interpretation. The act of returning

with new knowledge and fresh interpretations creates new terrain upon which the community may continue to grow" (197).

HOW CAN AN EROTICNALYSIS LEAD TO SOVEREIGNTY?

Power in My Blood engages Indigenous erotics to discuss critically the traditional and contemporary understandings of Indigenous bodies and their established belief systems surrounding sexual identity, sexuality, and gender. The concepts of nonconformity, corporeal sovereignty, kinship, gender, and tradition are used to examine Joseph Boyden's and Daniel Heath Justice's texts and explore the decolonizing potential of Indigenous erotics. This thesis examined Indigenous erotica to expose Indigenous female and male power as it is played out in communities today, and discovered some of the changes that have developed as a response to colonization.

The influence of Indigenous erotica should not be limited to, or seen as, counter narratives, channels for healing outlets, or post-colonial work. Rather, Indigenous erotica should be approached as a centralized mechanism for rematerializing the Indigenous body within a reimagined world. These reimagined narratives use plots and events that may be historically familiar to readers. For instance, readers find the character of young Niska facing a residential school experience, and, later in her life, they see her on the verge of succumbing to colonial pressures and moving to a reservation. Residential schools and experiences of living on reserve are highly recognizable narratives within Indigenous literature. One of the exciting differences in Indigenous erotica narratives is the offering of familiar stories, but with reimagined outcomes. As we have seen, Indigenous authors are reimagining, reforming, and remaking our histories through erotica. Justice's *Kynship* illustrates how Indigenous literary texts express principles of the erotic. His fantasy/sci-fi trilogy shares entire worlds that are on the precipice of the same colonial-induced genocide (a familiar,

haunting echo of our own harsh social realities of colonization). However, in the erotic literary realm, Justice has the power to reimagine history. We find his lead character, Tarsa, enduring painful exile from her community, a theme that echoes the experiences of Indigenous peoples in residential schools. Tarsa suffers, but her pain, grief, and trauma are lessened when she is embraced and guided by her relative, Unahi. There is similarity between Tarsa's struggle and residential school survivor stories, but Justice intervenes, and the story changes. The erotic intervention of Unahi is a critical moment in Justice's "reimagining." Endings we have become accustomed to – succumbing to despair, fighting with addictions, perpetrating crimes, ending up in jail, committing suicide – are not present. Instead, Tarsa becomes a Redthorn Wielder, a warrior knowledgeable in the ways of her people, in order to protect her kin. Recentring is not just about *refusing* the status quo or being different; it also questions traditions and offers up alternatives. Jennifer Denetdale argues:

> While it is necessary for Native scholars to call upon the intellectual community to support and preserve Indigenous sovereignty, it is crucial that we also recognize how history has transformed traditions, and that we be critical about the ways tradition is claimed and for what purposes. In some cases, tradition has been used to disenfranchise women and to hold them to standards higher than those set for men. Tradition is not without a political context (20–21).

Power in My Blood makes no romanticized claims about a pre-colonial egalitarian utopia, unfettered by wars, slavery, oppression, and disease. For the Indigenous erotic, contemporary egalitarianism must include concepts of gender equity, accountability, relationship, kindness, and reciprocity. The movement in Indigenous erotics steers away from the idea of counter-identification, a term that John G. Hampton (Chickasaw) describes as "an assertion of personal identity to protest settler dominance" (2). Our bodies are a crucial source of power, and we must be vigilant to

make sure we create definitions for own identities. Our reclamation of sovereignty over our bodies is the key to our sovereignty as Indigenous nations.

Power in My Blood employs an eroticanalysis with you, relentless reader. Throughout this thesis I have given you embodied exercises to complete. Some of them asked you to reflect on your place, your experiences and understandings of various concepts. Others required a more physical practice. As I mentioned when we first started, I hoped that these tasks would work in two ways: first, to demonstrate in practice that an eroticanalysis is an embodied state of being; second, to remind you of the Indigenous erotic space that you inhabit and that your reading of *Power in My Blood* should reflect that. Serving as a map for reclamation, *Power in My Blood* engages in a critical dialogue about traditional understandings of Indigenous bodies and established belief systems surrounding sexuality and gender. Audre Lorde's well-known statement declares that "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." So, forget about dismantling the damned master's house; we needn't concern ourselves with the master's house at all. What we do need to concern ourselves with is the building of our own houses. Our own damned houses, with our own damned tools. I hope *Power in My Blood,* embedded in a Nehiyaw'iskwew ethos, contributes to the growing toolbox of Indigenous methodologies.

Our tools may seem related
but that is because they are grounded in Indigenous worldviews.

Our tools may seem diverse,
but that is because they respect our tribal and community differences.

That being said, *Power in My Blood* is only one step in a larger process of discovery and embodiment of the erotic, a journey for both myself and you, erotic reader. The knowledge shared through ceremony, stories, experiences, and traditional teachings conveys the abstract and figurative knowledge required to grasp the deepest meanings of my work. In

sharing this knowledge and my eroticanalysis, I attempt to shift the dominant paradigm to one grounded in Indigenous terms. My Nehiyaw'iskwew terms.

When Walter Lightning sought out knowledge from Elder Art Raining Bird from Rocky Boy, Montana, he was overcome with worry that he would not prepare protocol correctly. The esteemed Elder was held in such high regard as a spiritual leader by his people that Walter had concerns that he would make a mistake in cultural protocol in front of him. He told this to the Elder. Walter relates what happened next: "Elder Art Raining Bird, for all of his stature and knowledge, was a living example of humility. He looked at me and answered with a deep kindness and understanding, saying 'It's nothing, my grandson. We don't know anything'" (8).

Kinanâskomitin

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