



TE WHARE WĀNANGA O  
AWANUIĀRANGI

# PARADIGM SHIFT: IDENTITY POLITICS & INDIGENEITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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*A thesis presented to Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi*



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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Barrón', with a stylized flourish at the end.

## **Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university or other institution.

This thesis represents research I have undertaken. The findings and opinions in my thesis are mine and they are not necessarily those of Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dawn Barrón', written in a cursive style.

Date: 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024

DEDICATION

To my beloved Grandfather, Elias “James” McDaniel (1901-2007)

&

Daniel, Sonrisa, Elias, Matthew – who journeyed with me.

### **Abstract**

As an Indigenous/Euro researcher my work is a complicated cartography through identity, claims and rights, and the over-arching elements of identity politics that serve to address the question: How Indigenous identity politics intersect, impact, and revolt against settler-colonial institutions of higher learning. Approaching this research from a grounded theory framework to open possibilities for developing or expanding a theory and praxis for Indigenous futurisms around belonging and identity, is the goal. The examination of the scope and depth of identity politics, historically through modern day, as habituated to restoring and destroying, protecting and disrupting the identities of marginalized, underrepresented Indigenous Americans, becomes the tool and lens to analyze the patterns and impacts of identity politics to define and lead Indigenous peoples into the future. By identifying the nuances and practices of self-determination, ancestral connections, and the role of modern identity politics of Native Indigenous Americans in kinship, community, and social groups, my intention is to bring forward the relationship between Indigenous peoples and identity politics within institutions of higher learning. Guiding questions of: is the political identity more present than the social/cultural identity; is the political identity of Indigenous students impacting their ways of knowing and learning; and is the role of identity politics promoting or challenging Indigeneity within colleges and universities? Institutions of higher learning can be transformative--an instrument to communicate and practice self-determination and sovereignty by integrating Indigenous pedagogy and utilizing Indigenous ways of knowing into best practice and not ancillary to the primary western pedagogical methods. The storied history of higher education institutions is one of systematic

obstruction and oppression of Indigenous students across the world, yet it is the status quo for the academy, thus protected from authentic, permanent change—but does it have to remain in this perpetual inequitable state? Learning within a colonized environment, with colonized curriculum and pedagogy, only serves to reinforce the concept that Euro-centric education is the best way to learn, to educate, to be civilized for everyone, regardless of cultural, political, or social identity. Systems of settler-colonialism, racism, classism, capitalism, and Christianity built the foundation for the matrix of identity politics to shape and develop into a tool—whose tool, what kind of tool—that is what this research will be examining.

*Keywords:* identity politics, Indigeneity, Indigenous pedagogy, Higher Education, settler-colonialism, belonging and identity, Native American, Indigenous Peoples

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**Paradigm Shift: Identity Politics & Indigeneity in Higher Education****PREFACE**

Like the rising and setting sun, my journey transcends modern concepts of temporal time and connects through the circle of ancestors, history, stories, and the future. Many Indigenous communities utilized the circle as both a pragmatic and metaphorical explanation for ways of knowing and being--this, before, and presently in spite of, Euro-centric boxes and linear lines that are indicative of a superior way of knowing and being. My research is a compilation, not a culmination, of being an Indigenous woman in academia.

The Choctaw, my ancestors, issued *Llvppa vt anli*—this is true—at the beginning of a story and with humility, I give this framework as it applies within this story. Research is a story; a researcher is a storyteller. Pieces of this research are my story, my truth and the rest are my analysis, evidence and sources supporting or refuting assessments, and the story work of others—without which this research would not exist. In my privileged position as the Director & Faculty of the Native Pathways Program (NPP), I work with many Indigenous and tribal people from diverse, often paradoxical lived histories, travelling through the education system, particularly at the Evergreen State College located on the ancestral lands of the Medicine Creek Treaty of 1854:

Articles of agreement and convention made and concluded on the She-nah-nam, or Medicine Creek, in the Territory of Washington, this twenty-sixth day of December, in the year one thousand eight hundred and fifty-four, by Isaac I. Stevens, governor and superintendent of Indian affairs of the said Territory, on

the part of the United States, and the undersigned chiefs, head-men, and delegates of the Nisqually, Puyallup, Steilacoom, Squawskin, S'Homamish, Stehchass, T'Peeksin, Squi-aitl, and Sa-heh-wamish tribes and bands of Indians, occupying the lands lying round the head of Puget's Sound and the adjacent inlets, who, for the purpose of this treaty, are to be regarded as one nation, on behalf of said tribes and bands, and duly authorized by them. (*goia.wa.gov*)

In the current climate of Land Acknowledgments, I want to make clear that I am a visitor on the lands that I live and work upon, and it is my practice to state the treaty information of the land, although there are varying, diverse oral stories that coincide, contradict, and expand upon the treaty information which is derived from the settler-colonial understanding and political narrative. As an Indigenous scholar my ultimate responsibility is to design, provide, and sustain curriculum and academic programs facilitating learning through an Indigenous lens, and integrating Indigenous pedagogy to critically analyze western thought for students. Indigenizing pedagogy and curriculum in (Western) institutions of higher learning is not an academic trend; it is poised (and overdue) to be recognized as a viable, visible practice that is inherent in integrity, academic rigor, and holistic knowledge systems.

The Native Pathways Program (NPP) at The Evergreen State College is an all-level, interdisciplinary degree earning curriculum that serves tribal, Indigenous, and all students from the main campus located in Olympia, Washington, regional tribal reservation/place-based sites, and remotely via virtual platforms. We are an intertribal program and inclusive of non-tribal students who want to expand their knowledge and practice within the broad field of Humanities. The curriculum is carefully choreographed

to add scope and depth to multiple fields of study in higher education, offering exploratory research through advanced critical work, facilitated through an Indigenous lens; and although the content also includes Western thought and ideas, an Indigenous worldview is explicitly observed. Students range between the ages of eighteen and eighty, beginning and returning students with diverse lived experiences, knowledge, and lives—and we value Relationality, Reciprocity, Personal Authority, and expanding Indigeneity through academia.

The concept of identity is paramount within NPP, particularly at the beginning of the educational journey. The following questions from curious (potential) students are commonplace and illustrate how important identity can be: do you have to be enrolled in a tribe to be in the program? Can I be in the program if I did not grow up with my culture? Do I have to live on my reservation to join? Can I be an Urban Indian? What if I am married to a Native and have Native children? What if I work for a tribe? Does it matter if I am light-skinned or do not look Native? Often the underlying question is how Native do I need to be and beneath that is: will I be accepted; do I belong? In my experience over the past decade working at a tribal college and in NPP and responding to such questions, rarely is a non-Native asking; moreover, the concerns come from descendants who are not enrolled, enrolled “light-skin” students, and students who “grew up” with a non-Native parent or in urban environments.

It is the universal human desire to know if there will be others like them. The need to categorize and belong. The desire for their story and voice to be welcome. Identity politics is the grouping of people based on cultural, traditional, ethnic, religious, and other identifying factors to form a political alliance (to fight oppression and have a

louder voice, per se, particularly within the area of politics—laws, policies, bills). What is at the outset different for Indigenous Americans is that to politically belong to the Native American category of dual citizenship and beneficiaries (debatable, of course) of Federal laws and policies, one must be enrolled in a federally recognized tribe. No other ethnic, racial, cultural, or politically aligned group has this fundamental precursor to belonging, from a legal standpoint.

The United States Census defines an American Indian/Alaskan Native (category or checkbox on the census) as “a person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment” (*census.gov*). To define a Native American in modern political discourse, it is a person who is a member or citizen of a federally recognized tribe—tribal enrollment is a political designation, not cultural, ethnic, or racial. The U.S. government itself, contradicts the definition or rather opens up the definition for the purposes of census data collection, then closes the definition to follow the legal definition imposed by the federal government (more on this in subsequent chapters about blood quantum, assimilation, and termination). The end goal is to decrease the responsibilities, thus funding the federal government legally owes the federally recognized tribes. In simple terms--less (legal) Indians equals less time, money, effort spent by the government.

This research is a way of being, a way of knowing that braids and un-braids multiple perspectives and stories to provide a common ground from which Indigenous people and institutions of higher learning can turn to as we all forge a holistic, more inclusive path of pedagogical approaches in higher education. As a mixed-heritage

researcher and writer, I approach my work from a Grounded Theory framework with curiosity and hope to expand my initial line of questioning: How do identity politics intersect, impact, and revolt against settler-colonial, Euro-centric pedagogy in institutions of higher learning for Indigenous people. Grounded Theory appealed to my intuition that this research question would become something else if I gave it the oxygen to regenerate or authentically expand. The idea that data from the research collaborators could be analyzed as gathered and insights used to propel the next step of data collection felt true and right. I had no intentions of trying to prove or disprove my own hypothesis in the sense that I wanted a dynamic and adaptable mode of navigating and collecting data. Grounded Theory became a relevant inductive research methodology around 1967 with the publication of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss' book, the *Discovery of Grounded Theory*.

The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research methodology that attempts to unravel the meanings of people's interactions, social actions, and experiences. In other words, these explanations are grounded in the participants' own interpretations or explanations. (Lumivero, 2020)

My research is focused primarily on the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island (North America) interchangeably referred to as Native Americans, Indigenous Americans, Natives, and Indians. To provide further scope and depth, especially in our globally connected Indigenous world, this project includes selected experience and research from the Māori scholars of Aotearoa (New Zealand).

The seed of my motivation and agenda was to examine how the concept of identity politics both perpetuates and alters pedagogical approaches in institutions of

higher learning that are in lands occupied by settler-colonizers. As I listened to the research collaborators' ideas and experiences, the roots expanded to exploring Indigenous identity *and* belonging through the lens of the Indigenous individual, as both a cultural and political being. Identity politics in concept can be contentious and regarded as a political burden to Indigenous people due to the repeated harm caused by settler-colonial political policies. Political agency and social capital belong to everyone. This research is mindful of the complexities and traumas that indigenous peoples carry around issues of identity and of partaking in the dominant political arena. In the end, it is a story of the ethos of Indigenous people.

Understanding the role of identity politics in the advancement of Indigenous Peoples' sovereign rights and future within the constructs of settler-colonial systems is to know the genocidal history and contemporary challenges that often create detrimentally dichotomous relationships within its power matrix. Practices of self-determination and sovereignty in tribal identity play a vital role in the political machinations of modern identity politics on a national and state level; but how are Indigenous Peoples impacted? What role does self-identification have, particularly within higher education? Is the collection of identity data being used to serve the demographics identified, or is it to assuage the mainstream, dominant culture that diversity and equity projects are in place? Furthermore, does identity politics serve to unite or separate?

### **Spiderweb Project**

My own journey and experiences as a student, an academic, and an administrator lived through an Indigenous body and spirit inform this research. While my

storied research, along with the research participants' voices, are addressed through my interpretations and data analysis, the hope is to highlight the common threads that create a web of interconnectedness and solidarity among many Indigenous peoples. It is without irony that the only group of people, braided into a cultural collective, who are put in the position of proving they possess the blood, the government documentation, and often the specific cultural acumen to claim their place of being from the first peoples of the land called North America. Identity and recognition play on the field of both the individual and the community, both the political and the social, and the objectives are not always the same, especially in institutions of higher education.

The original conception of this research grew into a spiderweb of more questions, multiple perspectives and voices, re-examining, re-evaluating, and a humbling of my curiosity, knowledge, and place. From the beginning, I want to situate myself as a seeker and a storyteller—seeking information and experiences willingly shared and telling the story of this research from all four directions (body, mind, heart, and spirit) of everyone involved. In my profession as an Indigenous Scholar, academic, and writer, I often mentor students of tribal, Indigenous, and bi- or multicultural backgrounds.

Listening to their stories, the topics of identity, belonging, feeling unwelcome, unrecognized, fetishized, and underestimated within institutions of higher learning presented an ongoing pattern. These patterns of concerns and commonalities within separate stories require examining the role identity politics plays in people living and being Indigenous Americans. What were we before settler colonization? As the late, great John Trudell (2001), in a spoken word presentation, said:

You look at how techno-logic civilization – and everywhere that it goes, the longer it's there, the more isolated the human beings – but they're not called human beings, they're workers and citizens, etc., alright? Alright? But the more isolated they feel, they no longer – you know, maybe they remember their grandparents or their great-grandparents. But see, you've got all that ancestral knowledge that's encoded in the DNA, but it's been cut off. So it can't activate because if we're not conscious that it's there then we can't – it just makes [things] difficult. See this is the memory that it's very important for them to erase. Alright, and it's about who we are – it's memory of identity and self-reality. We're not Indians and we're not Native Americans. We're older than both concepts. We're the people, we're the human beings.

This is not to detract from Indigenous worldviews or knowledge systems or culture; it is not a “why can't we all get along” sentiment—that is shallow and uncritical thinking—this is speaking directly to identity politics in that Indians, Native Americans, Indigenous Peoples are categorized as such only because of colonization. Without colonization, the original peoples—human beings—would not be identified in groups and subgroups, nor would their future existence be tied to any such marked identity. My reaction to this teaching has always been to slow my mind and body in order to be with the memory of the stories I was told growing up about who I belonged to, who I came from. I am not full-blood anything, yet I carry my ancestors' spirits as a fully embodied human being, regardless of the blood or DNA that occupies my body.

Welcome to the Pacific Northwest winter is what I am thinking as alternately looking out my window at the tiny arrows of rain traveling from sky to ground, a blanket of smoke-colored air covering all, and thinking that this weather will be an invitation for people to stay inside in semi-isolation and (hopefully) avoid more tragic loss from the pandemic. It is November 2022, and I am deep in the endeavor of researching, writing, collecting data, more researching, writing, and revising my work toward earning a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Indigenous Development and Advancement at Te Whare Wānanga O Awanuiārangi. I feel it pertinent to tell why I chose a program from Aotearoa (New Zealand) halfway around the world from my home. Firstly, I would have conducted this research project regardless of earning a degree because it called for me and, as such, I have an obligation. Secondly, I reviewed, interviewed, read other people's work in doctoral programs around my home region and nothing fully resonated. I was invited to a class meeting of a Māori designed and operated tertiary institution, a wānanga, on the lands of the Lummi Indian Tribe and after a lengthy discussion about my intentions and goals, I realized I had found a place to be, learn, and create. It was apparent that the foundations and philosophies we shared were both authentic and purposeful, underlying the urgency in staking claims, per se, for the inherent right to practice Indigenous ways of knowing within the academy. The ongoing work of demonstrating that the over-arching Euro-centric, dominant ways of knowing, learning, and being are *not* the only, or even arguably the best, practices in higher education is a strong motivator for engaging with a program and people on the opposite side of the world.

Identity politics itself is arguably not a vehicle for oppression, yet as this research explores, examines, and expands, I circle back toward the beginning, the origin story of my inquiry—the pride, pain, protectiveness, and possibilities surrounding “my” Indigenous students, and I know the stakes are high; I chose to do this research; I am ultimately accountable and responsible for the words and ideas on these pages and believe that this work will provide thought and action around for the future. The story of my paternal family that you will find interspersed throughout this research is constructed of memories, stories, official and personal documents, and, where applicable, will indicate my own conjecture.

As an Indigenous/Euro researcher who is *not* “white-passing/white-presenting<sup>1</sup>,” *not* enrolled in any of my ancestral tribes, and not ever truly “fit in” or felt authentically valued within academia, I am wholly--body, mind, heart, and spirit invested in presenting my findings and data analysis with diligence, integrity, and truth. And when I do not have the adequate words and cannot construct an academic sentence to create the atmosphere of the feeling, I offer poetry. In an interview, Cherokee poet Diane Glancy said this about poetry:

Poetry itself is memory. It comes from a long tradition—when a Native American tells a story (traditionally) they go back to the beginning and work their way forward. Thus, some stories can take days to tell. Poetry is part of all poetry that has been written and contains the early worlds somewhere within it—going back to the origin of poetry as breath, as root cause of being—meaning those who are rooted in struggling with the root-cause of meaning. Or explication of meaning in

the Mystery we are in. Poetry is an alternate universe—the only universe for those who have entered poetry. Poetry is origin. (Mishler, 2019)

When asked to describe this project, I am often at a loss for words; my mind cannot settle on images that provide the scope and intensity, the potency of memory and futurism, and I lack a lens large enough to capture the story. I can talk of the parts or the whole and then, like a dandelion going to seed, the wind blows all of it out of my vision and into another realm—a reborn story roots. Such is the way of sharing research as a narrator of multiple stories braided into one. It is the intersecting of concrete and abstract colonization that Indigenous peoples around the world, who have been disrupted and displaced by others settling on their lands, experience in the framework of cause and effect. Deborah Miranda (Esselen) (1999) writes of this in her gorgeous book, *Indian Cartography*, with the poem:

***After Colonization***

the land divided her loyalties between native  
and foreigner, then and now. We fell  
between the cracks like a laugh cut short,  
to be her first, her only, even as history encodes  
our bones with change. Whether by rape  
or love, violence or choice, we are survival  
made flesh. We walk through life unshielded  
and find boundaries, treaties, reservations  
that don't speak our names. We make camp,

make dinner, make love. Make war. We look  
for our own land to claim. When we find it,  
we'll declare a holiday for our children  
to celebrate. They'll learn ritual songs,  
memorize an arbitrary date, carve petroglyphs  
of the first Half-breed to set foot  
on the unfenced territory of the heart. (p. 82)

The territory of my uncolonized heart belongs to my children, blood and chosen, who are the change-makers and the culture teachers/practicers of the future. My children, like many children, are braided from diverse cultures. It is not so much living in two worlds as it is navigating dominant thinking and being structures and systems while protecting and practicing less traveled, less accepted, less understood ways of Indigenous thinking and being. The world is one world, comprised of too many differences to count; however, we can unify under specific values and beliefs that are lived experiences. This is what I would leave my children with: be fluid and ever-learning; be open in mind and experiences; share whatever gifts you possess—the abstract and the tangible; territories may change, and you may find your feet carrying you in a different direction, but follow the poetry and always give more than you take—from the land, people, all nonhuman living creatures—and you will never be alone on your journey. The hope that humanity grows in a forever circle and not in a linear line with beginning and end points, along with knowledge that the youth of today will lead this work for tomorrow and beyond. If we can recognize ourselves within others' stories,

there is an undeniable power, insight, and a belonging that happens, and this is how humanity enters the future in the best conceivable way.

### ***Grace in Times of Crisis***

During the research and writing of this project, the world-wide pandemic (COVID-19) began, altering and ultimately slowing down my research, especially the collection of data using Indigenous methods of engaging with research participants in face-to-face interviewing, talking/ listening circles, or attending cultural events. I estimate that 50% of the research was gathered prior to the onslaught of the pandemic and the remainder during; therefore, the nuances of body language, voice, tone and organic tangents leading to other ideas and questions were more difficult to navigate using the computer screen, written and phone interviewing. Although I do not feel that this challenge created gaps in the data analysis, it most certainly did with continuity of research—stops and restarts—but in the end, all I have is gratitude. I am honored by the interest, consideration, and time given of the research participants, even through personal and community tragedy and loss. This is for all the voices, here and departed, who championed and believed in my work, our work.

<sup>1</sup>"white-passing/white-presenting" indicates less melanin (light skin color) in a person of mixed-race.

**SECTION I: *East & Body******America, I Sing Back***

*for Phil Young, my father, Robert*

*Hedge Coke, Whitman, and*

*Hughes*

America, I sing back. Sing back what sung  
you in.

Sing back the moment you cherished breath.

Sing you home into yourself and back to  
reason.

Oh, before American began to sing, I sung her  
to sleep,

held her cradleboard, wept into her day.

My song gave her creation, prepared her  
delivery,

held her severed cord beautifully beaded.

My song helped her stand, held her hand for  
first steps,

nourished her being, fed her, placed her  
three sisters strong.

My song comforted her as she battled my  
reason

broke my long held footing sure, as any child  
might do.

Lo, as she pushed herself away, forced me to  
remove myself,  
as I cried this country, my song grew roses in  
each tear's fall.

My blood veined rivers, painted pipestone  
quarries  
circled canyons, while she made herself  
maiden fine.

and sing again I will, as I have always done.

Never silences unless in the company of  
strangers, singing

the stoic face, polite repose, polite, while  
dancing deep inside, polite  
Mother of her world. Sister of myself.

When my song sings aloud again. When I  
call her back to cradle.

Call her to peer into waters, to behold  
herself in dark and light,

day and night, call her to sing along, call her  
to mature, to envision—

Then, she will make herself over. My song  
will make it so

When she grows far past her self-considered  
purpose,  
I will sing her back, sing her back. I will sing.  
Oh I will—I do.

America, I sing back. Sing back what sung  
you in. (Hedge Coke, 2014)

## **CHAPTER ONE | INTRODUCTION**

### **Survivance**

The concept of using identity politics against Indigenous people, all over the world, has been a vehicle for mass genocide, termination, theft, and assimilation by settler-colonialism. Specifically, in the United States of America, Manifest Destiny--the ideology of westward expansion, European settler-colonialist dominion, and the genocide of Indigenous Peoples in North America was destined by their Christian God and the Doctrine of Discovery (also manifested by the Christian Church) that:

negated the rights of the Indian tribes to sovereignty and equality among the nations of the world. It took away their title to their land and gave them the right only to sell. And they had to sell it to the European nation that had discovered their land. (Deloria, 1969, p.30)

European settler-colonizers would not have been so successful without the politics of determining who and what an “Indian” was. The premise is that to decimate and try to eradicate a group of people, the perpetrators must first identify them. The Europeans who invaded, colonized, stole, and settled the lands known as North America (what we now refer to as Mexico, the United States, Canada) were broadly successful in imposing dominion over all living things. What they failed to grasp is the resilient spirit, the inherent connection with non-human living things, land, water, and above all--survival skills--of the Indigenous Peoples. Neither complete eradication nor full assimilation occurred; therefore, the “Indian problem” remains today.

“Survivance” in the context of the Native American world was coined by Gerald Vizenor, Anishinaabe scholar and sets this work not as a response or reaction but as a story with many storytellers talking about identity politics and Indigeneity. Vizenor states: “Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry” (1999, p.viii). I have read and heard people talk of Vizenor’s term as a melding of survival and thriving, which to me is simultaneously a historical narrative authority and a contemporary, futuristic call to action. Within the context of settler-colonial systems of genocide and subsequent oppression, Native Americans have defied the mythology and Western narrative of who and what they are by the very act of “surviving,” which *Merriam-Webster* defines as “remaining alive, especially after the death of another or others; continuing to exist; remaining intact.” Given the obstacles and challenges that seem unfathomable to people who have not experienced colonial violence and genocide, Natives are thriving, which is to “prosper and flourish.” Consider the cultural and language revitalization, the economic and political advances of many tribes, and the increase in Indigenous scholarship and leadership—surviving and thriving indeed. Situating Vizenor’s survivance, this research is a story telling of the past as it relates to the here and now with a firm placement in the future.

The question of how identity politics impacts Indigenous people is not a new topic, nor are the answers simple or without contradictions. Who and What is a Native American are questions that arose when the first explorers, then settlers arrived, and it became an even more pressing issue when the settlers decided to partake in the

colonization project. The identity of all Indigenous people will never fail to become political during the process of colonization, and will remain in the aftermath, because settler-colonialism is an ongoing, continual disruption of original ways of being. Vizenor edited the anthology *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2008), and the blurb about the book eloquently breaks down Vizenor's over-arching message:

The concept and idea of survivance has revolutionized our understanding of the lives, creative impulses, literary practices, and histories of the Native peoples of North America. Engendered and articulated by the Anishinaabe critic and writer Gerald Vizenor, survivance throws into relief the dynamic, inventive, and enduring heart of Native cultures well beyond the colonialist trappings of absence, tragedy, and powerlessness. Vizenor argues that many people in the world are enamored with and obsessed by the concocted images of the Indian—the simulations of indigenous character and cultures as essential victims. Native survivance, on the other hand, is an active sense of presence over historical absence, deracination, and oblivion.

To say I am obsessed with the workings of Vizenor's mind would be an understatement. In an interview he gave (2016) he talks about being known as a "crossblood" or "mixedblood" (he is of Anishinaabe and French ancestry) and the interviewer asks if he considers himself a "postindian writer" because Vizenor had explained that "the identity of the Indian is an absolute fake because the word has no referent in tribal languages and cultures." Vizenor replies with: "Postindian is a philosophical concept and discussion, a critical irony, not a state of presence or the description of a literary practice. I am a writer, a creative and critical writer, not a postindian writer."

Vizenor continues on to describe how his “aesthetic of survivance” has changed over time: “...earlier discussions of survivance as a cultural condition have become a more perceptive sense of survivance with literary irony” (Raljevic, 2016).

As I am creating this research project from the collecting of stories, be it in academic writing and research, poetics, song lyrics, personal interviews, talking circles, quantitative surveys, random conversations waiting for coffee, and my own personal cache of story-work, the essence of survivance both within and outside the story world is relevant to my work. In another interview, Vizenor (2018) discusses his thoughts on Native identity, particularly regarding how it relates to his creative writing, but to me, all writing is creative...so:

The heart of individual character and communal recognition is actually in the tease of native friends and families. Native identity is a union, not a mere declaration or material connection. Family histories and genealogical documents are obviously principal sources of native singularity, but the originality of native recognition and identity emerges with associations, totemic, cultural, literary, and the tease of friends. The seams and creases of identity are significant to me as a writer, the traces of union, and sense of presence in stories, a presence that is not revealed by celebrity, place names, or by the gossip theory of outsiders.

The main priority and purpose of my research is to determine common threads and establish connections between the concepts derived from the practice of identity politics for Indigenous people, then to locate these findings within Indigenous Ideologies and Knowledges, while acknowledging the framework of reality from a settler-colonial mindset. Adapting the elements of survivance that are pertinent to this project and will

substantiate the relationships between resistance and persistence, innovation and adaptation, this research is playing the long-game—survival, in its purest form.

*We are still here. Always. Since time immemorial.*

### **Approach to the Research**

When I tell folks what I am researching, everyone, regardless of identity—ethnic, cultural, or political belonging, has commentary and/or stories. Initially, I considered my research to be so exciting that it elicited immediate discourse; however, I came to realize:

1. many settler-colonizers came to America to find a place they belonged;
2. because the historical narrative of the “founding” of America is taught sans “Indian” truths and narratives, folks have little to no understanding of what “Indians” are;
3. before reading and writing, thus documenting, became common place as an indicator of the civilized, all people told stories, kept stories, shared stories as a form of record keeping and cultural survival;
4. and so, everyone has a story about who they are, where they come from, and what gives them the agency to belong to their *people!*

This is certainly not in support of the too-oft “my great-grandmother was a Cherokee princess” trope but made me consider identity politics and belonging from another perspective, a humanity-based lens. Through processing and formulating the above realization, I felt like I had found a thunder egg, the size of my fist covered with nodules and being perfectly content to hold and protect its mysterious content that could be

jasper, agate, opal, or chalcedony once opened. I am in a field of thunder eggs and need to carefully crack them open because I am in possession of unpolished stories that are only gifted to me because of relationship and trust. It is not my right to polish these findings to be palatable for others. That is my approach to this research. I am providing guiding questions but the answers and segues and lessons are not predictable, nor proof or disproof of anything other than what they are.

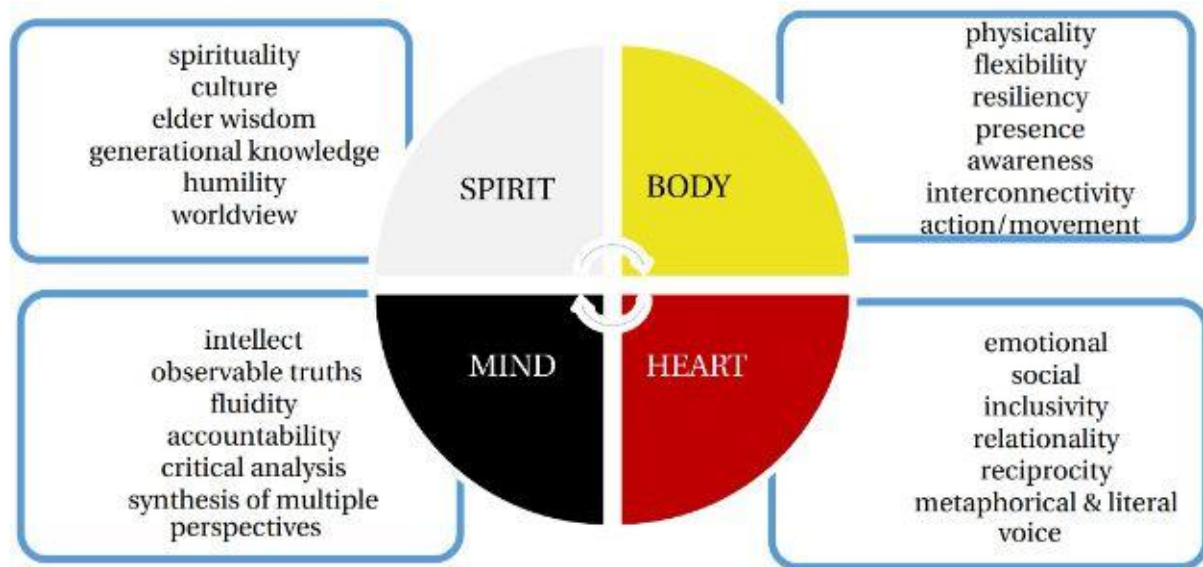
Exploring the concepts and practices of identity politics and its impact on Indigeneity is deeply personal, and I stand by the participants and their truths. It is not my place to question family histories and personal accountings of events, experiences, and reflections. In this work, I argue that the human need to belong is the crux of identity, self-determined and community-determined, and identity politics in practice, albeit perhaps not theory has always been about supporting the dominant power structure through a system of imposed decisions mimicking choices. Sandy Grande (2015) in her seminal work, *Red Pedagogy*, states: “By displacing the real sites of struggle (sovereignty and self-determination), the discourse of identity politics ultimately obfuscates the real sources of oppression—colonialism and global capitalism” (p. 138). Understanding the how and why is the first step on the journey, but the circle cannot be complete without the what--people’s stories that currently exist within the paradox of Indigenous identity politics.

While providing the facts of historical events, policies, laws, and tribal sovereignty that created the concept of identity politics as we know it today, I will also present scholarly works that explore multiple “sides” of the issue to fully engage with all

perspectives and offerings around the question: How does identity politics impact Indigenous people in community and in higher education?

The intended outcome of this project is to present a collective, multiple-perspective Indigenous story-work that “seeks to rectify the damage and reclaim our ability to story-talk, story-listen, story-learn and story-teach” (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 7). This was not a puzzle with 500 pieces that I just needed to fit together; it was like authoring an epic poem told by multiple speakers but narrated by me—a story journey that has no definitive end. When I write poetics, fiction, creative non-fiction, the words creating the stories may come from me, but once they are out in the world, readers often read and feel differently than I intended—a sometimes bittersweet experience. To ensure respect and reverence for the personal essence—mind, body, heart, and spirit--shared with me, all participants had final review, edit, and consent on their contributions.

The Circle presented below is from the essay, “Indigenist Inclusivity: The Circle and Belonging in the College Writing Classroom,” that Carmen Hoover and I co-authored (2022), designed to provide a visual of the four directions, colors, guiding essence, and attributes/values that accompany the sections. My approach to this research is woven into this way of being, learning, and knowing.

**Figure 1***The Circle****Research Design, Methods, & Data Analysis***

In the modern-day world ruled primarily by capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, identity politics has gained increased traction as a weapon used from the outside and from the inside to control who is Native American or Indigenous to a land. The purposes for identifying groups of Indigenous peoples, be them tribes or nations in North America, the Indios (Indigenous) in Mexico, or the Māori in Aotearoa (New Zealand) are political and economical regardless of sovereignty or self-determination because the more restrictions on the political status, thus power and responsibilities for, diminish. The less Indigenous people-- Indigenous people with political status, not racial or cultural—the more the dominant power structures gain in terms of resources (intertwined with the economy, national and global) and the less they pay out in owed responsibilities such as health care, education, and other treaty obligations under the current laws.

This research aims to investigate the relationship between the politics of identity and the culture of identity, using the guiding questions of how identity should be determined, who and what system determines identity, and where is the future of indigeneity headed--through the lens of identity. The significance of the research will provide individual, familial stories of identity, traditional ways of belonging, and a broad sweep of the contemporary issues around identity within Indigenous communities on Turtle Island, and globally, that can inform future tribal enrollment, disenrollment, and practices around identity and belonging, or uncovering the gaps for the future survival on a political front representative of Indigenous ways of knowing and being and of the reality of living as a 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian.

### ***Relationality & Accountability***

As an Indigenous researcher my main priority was to analyze and report my findings through a process of reviewing (then editing) the work with each of the contributors; furthermore, I will remain accessible when this work is “done” because the stories do not end here. As an academic in higher education, I witness the daily struggle of learning within the Euro-centric pedagogical practice implemented as the status quo that students must navigate. Paulo Freire profoundly said, “One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding” (1970, p. 67). As an Indigenous researcher and scholar, as a mother, educator, writer, and as a humanist, it is my responsibility to work toward changing the system to acknowledge Indigenous Peoples and the potency

of Indigenous scholarship that can further unravel systems of settler-colonialism that knot and bind us all to oppressive, devaluing practices.

I will follow the four principles of Relational Ontology as set forth by Shawn Wilson (2001) and Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999) that require researchers of Indigenous Peoples to be accountable, responsible, respectfully represent research participants and data analysis, and practice reciprocal appropriation. The conception and culmination of my research is a direct response to the trust and reciprocity between the research collaborators and me, as a community member and researcher. The golden rule in our home is to Give More Than You Take—a value I practice and adhere to in all directions of my life. We are all bound by the Circle. We enter, we journey, we leave, and we return.

### ***MEMORY SACK***

That first cry opens the earth door,  
We join the ancestor road,  
With our pack of memories  
Slung slack on our backs  
We venture into the circle  
Of destruction,  
Which is the circle  
Of creation  
And make more— (Harjo, 2020, p. 97)

***The People: Gathering Stories***

Working from an Inductive (auto-ethnographic, talking circles, interviews, observations, grounded theory) approach, I began with a small informal talking circle that consisted of four people—my colleagues and comrades—three women (2 cis-women, 1 non-binary) and one man (a cis-male). We all work together in higher education, and I have been in relationship with them from seven to twenty plus years.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, we would meet in person sharing food, stories, hopes, tears, and laughter. During this time, the circle gave feedback regarding the research question I proposed and started telling their stories. I did not audio record any of our talks, per requests, but took copious amounts of notes and web diagrams to connect the ideas and information. During the terrifying time of the pandemic, this research was halted. However, toward the end of the pandemic (meaning when social engagement was considered safe again, with social distancing), the talking circle mentioned above met via Zoom (on-line) and responded to a series of open-ended questions. There are many, too many, vulnerable people within our community (elders, immune-compromised), and unnecessary risks were not taken during this period of two plus years, which created a less than ideal time and space for this research. I state this not for the research collaborators but for myself, knowing that my research topic could bring more heartbreak to people already in crisis and experiencing loss.

From the original talking circle, two core talking circle groups emerged: the first consisted of three women between the ages of 44 and 62 years, and the second included two men and three women, all under the age of 30 years. The structure was

semi-formal in that I offered questions or themes (different for each circle) that the participants used to ground their story sharing. The first talking circle occurred during the beginning of 2021 on zoom and again in the fall of 2021 in person. The second talking circle met in person in the summer of 2021. These talking circles provided the foundation of themes and topics to explore and evaluate through the following years of creating this project.

When it was safe, and people felt comfortable, after the fall of 2021, I met with seven participants (all people within my sphere of relationships) to do formally informal, semi-structured one-on-one personal interviews. The interviews were formal and semi-structured only in that I had prepared guiding questions but followed the research collaborators wherever their voice and story went. I began with the same opening to gather collaborator information--a brief overview of my project, gratitude for their time and interest, explaining they would have final say over anything that I included, and if they would like to be anonymously cited. Some interviews lasted hours and others weeks, months, and years of hearing more stories and being in relationship. Out of the in-depth interview collaborators, four have been so invested that they (unprompted) send articles, memes, and updates on their (changing) perspectives on identity politics and related topics. I cannot effectively express my gratitude for their time and contributions to this work.

I also gave written interview questions (closed and open-ended) to a group of students and recently graduated folks, as well as an on-line survey designed to gather data regarding Native/Indigenous students' experience in higher education. The rationale of developing and presenting this qualitative method of a formal interview

questionnaire, and the quantitative online survey, was an attempt to gather as much data as possible by providing multiple modes of participation for the purpose of identifying impacting factors and patterns, albeit from a relatively small pool of research collaborators as detailed in subsequent chapters.

To engage intertribal and intergenerational voices, the people I asked to participate in the talking circles and interviews were selected from my sphere of connections and relationships considering the following four areas: age (for generational voices, geolocations (for urban and rural voices), tribal and Indigenous (for enrolled and non-enrolled voices) and higher education (student, alum, faculty voices). These general areas of diversity demonstrate the complexity *and* shared epistemologies of Indigenous Americans in this research project.

The research participants within the following chapters are called, more appropriately, collaborators or research collaborators.

### ***My Positionality***

It is important to note that I identify within the academy as a Native/Mexican/Scots-Irish woman who has studied, learned, and worked in a Western-dominated education system but practiced, inserted, and asserted Indigenous knowledges and pedagogy, before I even had the language and framework to describe who I am, what I believe, and why/how/what I do in my teaching and administrative profession. I am confident in my skills and abilities to work within both western and Indigenous paradigms in higher education, even as they present major differences in my personal paradigm. This is not acceptance as much as a necessity to survive in a

system surreptitiously devoid of giving credence or legitimacy to the thoughts and ideas of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) women, outside the status quo.

### ***Data Analysis & Ethical Principles***

The analysis of collected data is framed by Indigeneity; assessed through the theoretical lenses of Tribal Critical Race Theory, Indigenous Feminisms, and Social Justice and Transformation; and evaluated within Kaupapa Māori Theory and Red Pedagogy Theory. My biases as a mixed-race cis woman in academia, with lived experiences grounded in poverty, violence, classism, and racism undoubtedly reside in the core of my being and situate my worldview; I acknowledge my subjectivity, conjecture, and assumptions as they surface while tending to this project.

Some in the academy, the scholarly folks who rely on book knowledge more than lived knowledge, presume this lack of objectivity to be a grave limitation, a detriment to producing quality research. What they fail to realize is that every human being carries their whole self, biases, beliefs, hopes, and knowledge wherever they go, whatever they do; there is no such definitive thing as objectivity, not even with quantitative data-- numbers can be organized to tell a particular story also.

My analysis methods of the research collaborators' stories are based upon grounded qualitative analysis that categorizes the collaborator's interpretations, explanations, and stories by emergent themes in identity, Indigeneity, belonging, education, tribally enrolled, unenrolled, time and place. Patterns, intersections, and disconnections within the theme areas are presented in the findings as they manifested within the data. Collaborator responses were analyzed through The Circle to identify the

points of Indigenous worldview and practices demonstrated in specific data (individual stories) and across the collective research project (talking circles, group interviews, surveys, and the data as a whole).

Research is “systematic; that is, it is the adoption of a strategy or a set of principles to study an issue of interest” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 6), and as such, my system and strategy is to adhere to the principles rooted in Indigenous ways of being. I place myself within the circle, not as a guide but as a vulnerable participant with my relatives; my role in this community project is to gather stories, scholarly research, and investigate the findings to identify patterns, correlations, and Indigenous futurisms.

### ***Intergenerational & Historical Trauma: Identity & Education***

The role that intergenerational trauma plays in Indigenous American’s lives is important to put forth for a comprehensive understanding of the lasting impacts of the genocide, loss of land, people, and culture of Native people. “When one examines the history of American society, one notices the great weakness inherent in it. The country was founded in violence. It worships violence, and it will continue to live violently” (Deloria, 1969, p. 255). When a population of people experience hundreds of years of systematic destruction and death at the bequest of another group of people, the effects do not end with new policies or laws, retributions, reparations, or reconciliations. And none of these things were an ending to the ideologies and practices of the settler colonial powers that came to be on Turtle Island, for each new era ushered in a new way to eliminate, decrease, or otherwise attempt to incapacitate Indigenous Americans.

Violence begets violence but not necessarily violence against the perpetrator of the initial violence. The violence within Indigenous American communities is caused by the years of forced assimilation, imposed poverty, denied rights to cultural practices, and even in the mythizing of the essence of the “vanishing race.” Understanding the Native American and Indigenous Peoples worldview is to be cognizant of the concept of time and temporal space in relationship to historical trauma and how the western perspective does not incorporate the same elements of knowing and being.

Western thought conceptualizes history in a linear temporal sequence, whereas most Native American thinking conceptualizes history in a spatial fashion.

Temporal thinking means that time is thought of as having a beginning and end; spatial thinking views events as a function of space or where the event actually took place (Duran, 1995, p.14).

The concept and practices of identity politics must be viewed through the lens of Intergenerational and Historical Trauma to acknowledge and fully engage with the cartography and history of how identity politics has grown into a divisive, and traumatic for many, contemporary issue.

### **Organizing this Research**

As illustrated in this introduction chapter, the original (seed) idea and purpose of my research was to extrapolate an Indigenous definition of identity and identity politics within the realm of Indigeneity, as well as the impacts of identity politics on Indigenous people in institutions of higher learning. The initial talking circles became the soil from which the seed grew roots, thus the research developed to examine the multitude and

nuanced facets of identity *and* belonging through the lens of self-determination, decolonization, identity politics, individual and group perspectives of the research participants/collaborators. I remain aware of my positionality as a non-tribally enrolled person in data collection, analysis, and presentation of my findings.

This project is comprised of four organizing sections, paying homage to the Medicine Wheel and Four Directions of life: East & Body, South & Heart, West & Mind, and North & Spirit. The sections begin in the east, the place of the rising sun and the point of entry into the journey, traveling the circle—South then West and into the North, not as an ending point but as a full circle.

### ***SECTION I: East & The Body***

The journey's opening starts with entering from the east, the place the sun rises from each day, thus a beginning. Represented by the color yellow, symbolizing not only the rising sun and the beginning of a day, but the vibrancy, newness, awakening, and curiosity of the essence of the body. The sacred medicine associated with this direction is tobacco. Tobacco was grown and used by Indigenous Americans along the mid and southeast coast of Turtle Island and was a major reason colonizers settled this area and forced the Indigenous people off their homeland; the profits amassed from stealing the land, cultivating, and exporting the tobacco to Europe (who had none)—was worth killing for. The season is spring and birth. The element is air.

## **CHAPTER ONE | INTRODUCTION**

Sets the widely accepted definition of identity politics on the page to examine the historical, social, economic, and cultural implications and practices around indigenous

identity. By placing cultural identity in the political arena, the question of self-identification becomes not only controversial but tied to dollars in higher education. This research as guided by “survivance,” a term coined by Gerald Vizenor, Anishinaabe critic, cultural theorist, and writer--that is, “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name,” (2008) is explored to provide significance and relevance that supports the value of my research topic in the contemporary world.

The introduction also provides the reader with a bird’s eye view into my time and space, where I am living and working from, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. By situating myself within the circle of research, my story and relationality become part of, not apart from the bigger project. Humans recognize patterns in all aspects of the lived experience to make sense of the world around them. A paradigm is a pattern, and I am investigating, primarily through story-work, if a paradigm shift--a fundamental and practicable change in how we approach Indigenous identity and education—is imminent.

## **CHAPTER TWO | BRAIDING: METHODOLOGIES, METHODS, & THE PEOPLE**

Focuses on Indigenous Methodologies honoring and centering Indigenous worldviews, place, and culturally based contexts, and interpreting research data from an Indigenous lens, through the theoretical frameworks, as well as practical application thereof, of Kaupapa Māori Theory, Tribal Critical Race Theory, Red Pedagogy, and Indigenous Feminisms. This project uses Mixed Methods, qualitative and quantitative, to collect data by one-on-one interviews, written interviews, talking circles, closed and

open-ended surveys, cartographic and visual analysis, and literature reviews (primarily presented throughout the research). I will show how my research is governed by inductive reasoning, on the premise of Grounded Theory; therefore participant-centered, relying on the collected and analyzed data to inform and articulate the findings of the research.

By design, the introduction to the demographics of the research participants will be in story-work form, demonstrating the structure of presenting the collected data in subsequent chapters, from a point of view of authentic story, as pure and unaltered as possible to concretely illustrative my values and practice of Indigenous ways—story as cultural transmission. This chapter includes the commonly accepted ethical considerations and practices of a research project formed by, with, and for Indigenous Peoples, as well as my personal understanding of Relationality and Reciprocity, and the boundaries or limitations of this research.

## ***SECTION II: South & The Heart***

Moving into the next phase of the journey, one is directed south and guided by the heart and emotions. Represented by the color red to symbolize the heat during the middle of the day, as well as the urgency and depth that comes during enacting new things as one is stepping out of childhood and into adulthood. The sacred medicine is sage. Sage is found in many geographical regions across the world in many different varieties of plant; white sage grown in the southwest (California) is being over-harvested, lost to urbanization, and culturally appropriated by non-Indigenous businesses and people. The season is summer and youth. The element is fire.

**CHAPTER THREE | IDENTITY POLITICS & INDIGENEITY, POV**

Examines the premises that molded the project of America and the role identity politics played in achieving the goal of Manifest Destiny and westward expansion. Through rhetorical modes, the concept of “Indians” as other, separate from the white settlers, and the use of “tribes” to group the “merciless savages” together, were integral in the process of divide and conquer. It is more efficient to control people when they are othered and gathered en masse. This process contributed to not only the displacement of many Indigenous Peoples, but it also impacts contemporary identity politics for Indigenous Americans because tribal citizenship requires ancestral names on governmental rolls.

This chapter includes the primary literature reviewed, illustrating a timeline of the concept of identity politics being subverted and weaponized against Indigenous Peoples. By examining scholarly and creative work addressing issues with identity politics from both a Western and Indigenous perspective, the work presented will provide scope and depth in inquiry, claims, and counterarguments. *From* is an ambiguous word and idea--where are you from can mean a myriad of things depending on the context and who is asking. In Indian Country, *where are you from* is interchangeable with *who is your family* and at the root of such inquiry is who are your Indian people. In general society, my experience of the question (as I have been asked too many times to remember) is a precursor to: what are you, or do you belong here? Either way, in Indian Country or in America, the question underlies the desire to place or identify an individual in relation to where (or to whom) they belong.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR | BLOOD & BELONGING**

This chapter delves into the story data and findings from the research participants, as well as an auto-ethnographic account of the relationship of this researcher to the research topic will be presented in connection to the governing theme of the chapter, blood and belonging. The tie into the Heart is the expression of many of the research collaborators “discovering” who they are, learning the historical forces that created blood quantum and rolls, thus an Indigenous identity outside of the cultural and community, and the complexities, considerations, and feelings surrounding the status, political Indian citizen. This chapter also shares historical, theoretical, and contemporary views around the concepts of Indigenous identity and identity politics.

A journey from pre-colonization to modern ways of belonging through the political, tribal sovereignty, and social lens’ of the research participants is presented in the form of interviews, talking circles, and case studies. The origins of blood quantum and government rolls to identify and categorize Native American people is explored, with a brief pre-colonial overview of the modes and methods tribes, bands, and clans created social groupings. This chapter by no means offers solutions to modern issues within political, legal identity of Indians or tribes; however, the information presented aims to portray the lost or untold narratives of how identity politics can negate the Indigenous ways of being and worked hand-in-hand with termination, relocation, and eradication policies toward Indigenous Peoples.

#### **CHAPTER FIVE | RECOGNITION REALITIES**

We begin with the broad question: What is recognition, in everyday lives and experiences? And as the spiderweb is wont to, these stories become an interconnected

thread woven together, often unseen until complete, demonstrating multiple-perspectives and understandings grounded in the shared experiences, worldviews, and relationships that I have been gifted during this research project. This is not an advocating of a particular method or action, nor provides solutions to dismantle or re-create the operating mechanisms of Indigenous recognition but offers provocative questions that arose from the talking circles and interviews. The concept of pretendianism is also explored in relationship to tribal sovereignty and citizenship.

Focusing on the heart-work involved in the sharing of individual and familial stories, one-on-one personal interviews are provided to illustrate the interconnected web of Indigenous identity politics, the human need to belong and find place and purpose. In this chapter, personal interviews will tell the story from the distinct perspective of each individual participant as to ideas surrounding healing—from the guiding wisdom of the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual realms of the Medicine Wheel.

### ***SECTION III: West & The Mind***

The West is a time of the mind and the intellect being stimulated to the fullest because the body and heart have reached a place of reflection and balance. The body is slowing, yet the mind is stimulated with knowledge. Represented by the color black (the absence of all color), which symbolizes the setting sun followed by nightfall. The sacred medicine is cedar. Climate change and human harvesting are causing many types of cedar trees to decline. The season is autumn and adulthood. The element is water.

## **CHAPTER SIX | THE SACRED HOOP**

By looking through the lens of Indigenous Feminisms, this chapter expresses the importance of story-work and relevancy of worldviews generated from lived experiences. In the Introduction of *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, Indigenous story-work is described as exemplifying Indigenous methodology. “Acutely aware of the way in which research as a tool of colonization has scripted our stories with encryptions of hegemonic oppression, Indigenous storywork seeks to rectify the damage and claim our ability to story-talk, story-listen, story-learn and story-teach” (2019, p.7). Indigenous Feminisms calls out colonization as the changepoint in how the Indigenous way of being was converted to tell an opposing narrative where patriarchy and the Western way of being became the main characters, plot, and theme.

In the landscape of survivance, “the sacred hoop” which the Medicine Wheel has also been referred to, is not just symbolic but a representation of what Paula Gunn Allen (1986) argues was the Indigenous way of life based on “spirit-centered, woman-focused worldviews” – an ideology, if you will, that should be brought back into the cosmology of Indigeneity. This chapter offers research collaborators’ stories that, upon close examination, speak to the loss of this aspect of the sacred hoop.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN | LANDSCAPES OF LEARNING**

In examining the structures of higher education from an institutional perspective, the struggle for learning within Euro-centric ideological and pedagogical frameworks that settler-colonialism has implemented as the status quo, is detrimental to the Indigenous student bringing their whole self into the learning experience. As institutions

of higher learning can be agents of change and positive forces of growth, they can also subvert Indigeneity by engaging in active modes of assimilation into the Western mainstream education system that is antithetical to valuing and expanding Indigenous ways of learning as a standard and customary practice, not a diversity and equity box to be checked for the administrative report. Resisting assimilation into the mainstream educational structures is vital to securing Indigenous Peoples' place in, and outside, the system. Survivance by resisting assimilation and promoting self-determination can be framed within Tribal Critical Theory (Brayboy, 2005) by centering the impacts colonization, particularly settler-colonization, continues to have on mainstream societal systems and Indigenous peoples to address issues of inequity and harm.

Institutions of higher education have a storied history in the continual oppression of Indigenous peoples, yet we, as Indigenous peoples, have become enmeshed within the status quo system. Out of necessity, out of the inherent urge to survive, out of the spiral of genocide. Learning within a settler-colonized environment, within a colonized curriculum and teaching modalities, only serves to reinforce the concept of Euro-centric education as a model that is not only accepted but is viewed as the only legitimate way to learn. This chapter tells the stories of research collaborators' experiences within the education system born of the settler-colonial ideologies and practices of eradication, termination, and assimilation.

**CHAPTER EIGHT | UNSETTLING**

Addresses the research participant/collaborator's lived experiences, thoughts, and practices for unsettling the western paradigm within higher education. The term "unsettling" feels appropriate because the outcome when Indigenous scholars, educators, and students make Indigenous pedagogy or Indigenous Knowledges key in their ways of being and learning in the academy, the response is often uneasiness by the dominant white culture.

This chapter considers the disruption of status quo within the academy, as well as the current backlash within American education systems to deny non-white narratives throughout fields of study, particularly within the Humanities. The banning of books, the erasure of any history other than white, the anti-affirmative action and funding cuts for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion programming and personnel are direct results of the white-supremist ideology that is the settler-colonial guiding principle. Systems birthed from settler-colonial hegemony laid the foundation for the matrix of identity politics to shape and develop. This chapter will also set the framework of understanding the stages of what Bonnie and Eduardo Duran (1995) refer to as intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder of the Native American community.

**SECTION IV: *North & The Spirit***

Curving back toward the beginning, we reach North. Represented by the color white (all colors combined), symbolizing the moon and stars. The sacred medicine is sweetgrass. Guided by the Spirit, which resides in all parts of the circle, intersecting and

balancing the sacred with the mundane. The season is winter and death—so that the circle can be reborn and continue as it always has done. The element is earth.

### **CHAPTER NINE | INDIGENOUS FUTURISMS**

Traveling toward the north of the Medicine Wheel and Circle, Indigenous futurism imparts multiple-perspective, cross-Indigenous cultural stories of what I would call Injunuity, perfectly described in the independent film, *Injunuity* (2013) as “a collage of reflections on the Native American world, our shared past, our turbulent present, and our undiscovered future.” Seeking the connective tissue between the past, present, and future, this chapter strives to create a working composition of the journey forward addressing the claim that since time immemorial Indigenous Peoples have enacted their identities through ways of knowing and being that persevere despite genocidal acts. Looking through Gerald Vizenor’s “survivance” and speculative “fiction” lens, we will continue to expand our knowledge and learning by seeing what is possible, by understanding what has been and what is.

This chapter returns inward to Indigenous epistemologies by asking: How does one know who one is? Where does the knowledge arrive from? How do we know a thing to be true? To understand the past is to see into the future; to be authentically present in the here and now requires a temporality within the framework of Indigeneity.

### **CHAPTER TEN | PARADIGM SHIFTING**

Outlines the findings and conclusions of this research project. A paradigm shift is “a fundamental change in approach or underlying assumptions,” and within these pages a story emerged that is connected through time and space, a call-to-action for a transformative shift of collective mindset to disengage from the contemporary divisive

(war strategy of divide and conquer) ideology surrounding identity politics, Indigeneity, and Natives in life and higher education.

Inclusive of the fluidity and limitations of the theoretical, and examining the gaps between theory and praxis, this chapter offers suggestions for further investigations and considerations into this work. The findings as analyzed, synthesized, and presented in this chapter are an ode to the ancestors, the scholars, the creatives, and the future generations that keep telling the collective stories of what it means to be human, and Indigenous. My closing reflections on the findings, the limitations, and the future are included in the pursuit of closure to this project, in time and space, and the beginning of another...

## ***EPILOGUE***

My personal reflections on the process of this project, from the body, heart, mind, and spirit framework. This section also includes my Acknowledgments.

## **Terminology & Choices**

Regarding terminology and word choice used in this project, the terms U.S., North America, and Turtle Island are used to describe and discuss the original lands of the Indigenous peoples of all North America pre-colonization.

- The terms of *Indigenous Americans*, *Native Americans*, *American Indians* or *Native* are used to talk about the Indigenous Peoples of North America.

- The term *Indian* is used when referencing federal policies, treaties, and stories where applicable to the narrative, and to keep aligned to the intended message thereof.
- The terms *mixed-blood*, *mixed-race*, and *mixed-heritage* are used to signify peoples of more than one ethnicity, race, and/or cultural background.

*Status Indian* refers to a tribal citizen, a politically legal Native, and a person or group that possesses an official U.S. document issued by the B.I.A. (Bureau of Indian Affairs) Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) card.

None of these terms are perfect or agreed upon universally. Language is a fluid piece of culture, and terms of identity fall in and out of favor, as well as are accepted in certain regions or in certain generations, but not others. Similarly, there are terms for laypeople and terms used in the academy that both denote the same thing; however, the connotations vary depending on who is using and the context. For instance, the term *Indian* is used in the legal documents and treaty documents of the U.S. even though we know that the term was generated from settler-colonial false narratives. Some folks claim the term NDN, typically pronounced “In-Din”—this is often viewed as insider language and deemed by most, but not all, disrespectful for outsiders to use the term. Others use their tribal names or original names and depending on the geo-location and history of the U.S. academic institution, Native American and American Indian are used.

I attempted to primarily utilize the term Indigenous Americans to indicate the original, first peoples of the land that is commonly understood by the name America, while acknowledging this term is not perfect but, for the purposes of this research, is the

most inclusive. I write *attempted* because, as I do when writing my own ideas and analyzes, I am often not grounded in the mind but balancing the intellect with my heart, body, and spirit; therefore, I write whatever flows to the page.

### **Brief Glossary (as related to this research project)**

- *Genocide* for the purposes of this research is the act(s) of destroying, eradicating, terminating, and killing the Indigenous peoples of the land.

- *Indigenous* means the first peoples of a place.

I.

- *Indigenous futurism* is a term originally coined by Grace Dillon (Anishinaabe) to describe a genre of creative writing/storytelling that can be connected to Vizenor's "survivance" -- "telling stories to overcome the lived experience of tragedy, dominance, and victimhood" (Dillion, 2021)
- *Indigeneity* is the act of honoring and practicing (or giving space to) Indigenous ways of being and knowing.
- *intergenerational trauma* is trauma passed down through generations regardless of belonging to an oppressed or marginalized or cultural group; like the trauma that comes from going through the Great Depression; whereas *historical trauma*

is trauma caused in the past to a specific group of people, typically from an "event" such as the Holocaust or Native American genocide.

- *Settler Colonialism* is the ongoing act of non-Indigenous peoples settling and taking over the land, water, resources, culture, economy, politics, social norms, and enforcing their own ways of being and knowing, ideologies and practices as the dominant structure over the Indigenous peoples. This differs from *colonialism* because the settlers do not leave the homelands of the Indigenous people but instead take over all aspects of existence.

### **Closing Reflections**

Researching the impact of settler-colonization requires a foundational understanding of the ongoing systems of oppression and silencing of the Indigenous people of the colonized land. One must accept that interruptions and loss of Indigenous traditions, ways of being, and knowledge systems began in earnest at the point in time when the original peoples of North America (and other colonized places) were identified as apart from the settlers, as *other*. This chapter provides an overview of the scope, process, and people of this research project by explaining the Medicine Wheel and Circle framework and the positionality of this researcher.

I offer the opening of Gwen Nell Westerman's (Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota  
Oyate/Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma) poem as reflection:

***Linear Process***

Our elders say

the universe is a

circle.

Everything

returns to its

beginnings.

But where do we go

from here?

Where are

our beginnings? (2018, p. 68, Lines 1-10)

## **CHAPTER TWO | BRAIDING: METHODOLOGIES, METHODS, & THE PEOPLE**

### **Indigenous Research Paradigm**

Within Indigenous cosmology, which is the origin story of the universe, all individuals are connected and in reciprocal relationship to all other living and non-living beings; the relationships are non-hierarchical, and nothing is of more value or worth. In this way of being and knowing, the researcher is never separate from the research.

A research paradigm is a way of describing a worldview that is informed by philosophical assumptions about the nature of social reality (ontology), ways of knowing (epistemology), and ethics and value systems (axiology). A paradigm also has theoretical assumptions about the research process and the appropriate approach to systematic inquiry (methodology). (Chilisa, 2012, p.20)

Deeply embedded and impenetrable within the dominant research paradigm is the “fundamental belief that knowledge is an individual entity...therefore knowledge can be owned by an individual” (Wilson, 2008, p.50). At the core, or center of, Indigenous research paradigm is that knowledge cannot be individual, owned or otherwise; knowledge is relational and “you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research” (Wilson, 2008, p. 50). All relations from an Indigenous perspective encompasses all living and non-living things; we are in relationship, thus accountable, to all, throughout time and space. Indigenous methodologies privileges voices and lived experiences of Indigenous people, recalls lessons from the land and waterways, while emphasizing the social, historical, and political contexts that impact the future. Framing

this research project, “supports the complexity that is associated with explicating ontological, epistemological, and axiological concepts that may be foreign to western scholarly convention” (SGCoE). Reciprocity means we are on a path together and allows for the possibility of a relationship based on accountability, which means we are grounded in trust and truth, and we avoid double standards and expecting a return.

Reciprocity comes from the Latin word *reciprocates* which means “moving backwards and forwards.” This simple definition makes me think about the temporality of time and how we all live in a world dictated by linear systems and structure, regardless of if they create or sustain health and well-being. One can move backwards and forwards, simultaneously, for this is the Indigenous way from the beginning.

### **The Seeds of My Methodology**

The cornerstone of my research is grounded in Indigeneity, formed through honoring, and borrowing from theories, creative works, philosophies, and practices of Indigenous scholars and creatives, as well as other contributors whose worldview encompasses an Indigenous lens of inquiry and analysis. To name everyone would be dull for the reader, as well as inevitably incur remission on my part that I would then persevere on for far longer than necessary. At various points in my life, professionally, personally, and creatively, I have relied on past teachings, sought out new knowledge, been in the right place at the perfect time to meet and engage with a person or place that illuminates my journey—my relationships and connections have cultivated and deepened my understanding and commitment to the ancestors and next seven generations. To articulate this multi-faceted Indigenous Methodology, I am relying on

my interpretation and expression of the following “7 Guiding Principles”—Respect, Responsibility, Relationality, Refusal, Reciprocity, Relevance, and Gifting that were developed that include the 4Rs in First Nations education - respect, relevance, responsibility, reciprocity, (Kirkness and Barnhart, 2001), and the added principles of relationships and refusal (Johnston et al., 2018) and gifting (Kuokkannen, 2007). My purpose is to create the landscape on which this research lives and is sustained:

*Respect* is to uphold Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous philosophies, theories methodologies, pedagogies, content, and delivery

*Responsibility* engages Indigenous peoples and communities in ongoing ways to ensure accountability and protection of indigenous knowledge

*Relationality* recognizes that learning Indigenous knowledges is a relational ongoing practice grounded in relationship to the whole cosmos including humans and non-humans we are all connected

*Refusal* is to understand that Indigenous ways of knowing do not neatly fit into euro western thought or norms, understanding indigenous ways of knowing may not conform to the dominant culture

*Reciprocity* includes working with Indigenous communities and is give more than you take, or give before you take

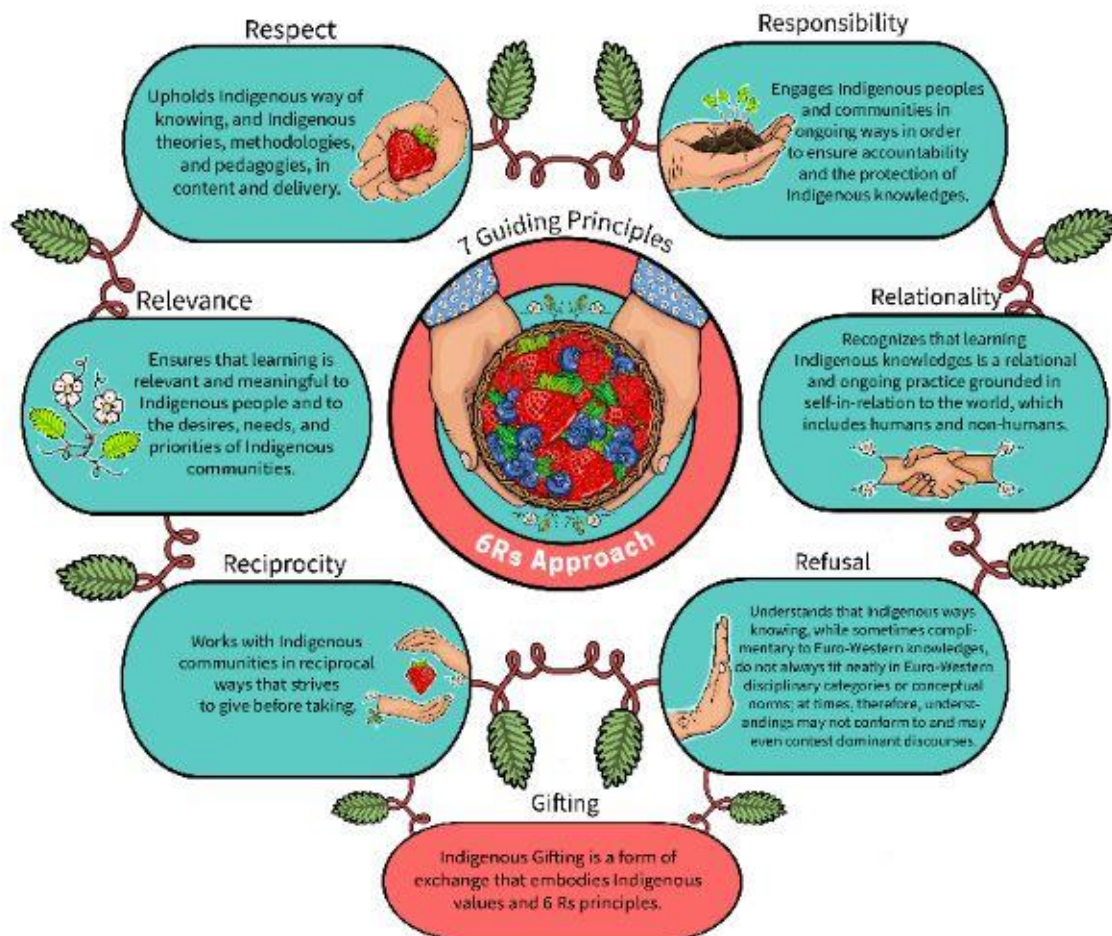
*Relevance* ensures that learning is relevant and meaningful to Indigenous peoples and their needs and priorities of their communities

*Respect* is upholding Indigenous ways of knowing and being as valuable and its best practices just as western ways of knowing and being are upheld

*Gifting* is a form of exchange that embodies Indigenous values and the six principles listed above

**Figure 2**

*7 Guiding Principles*



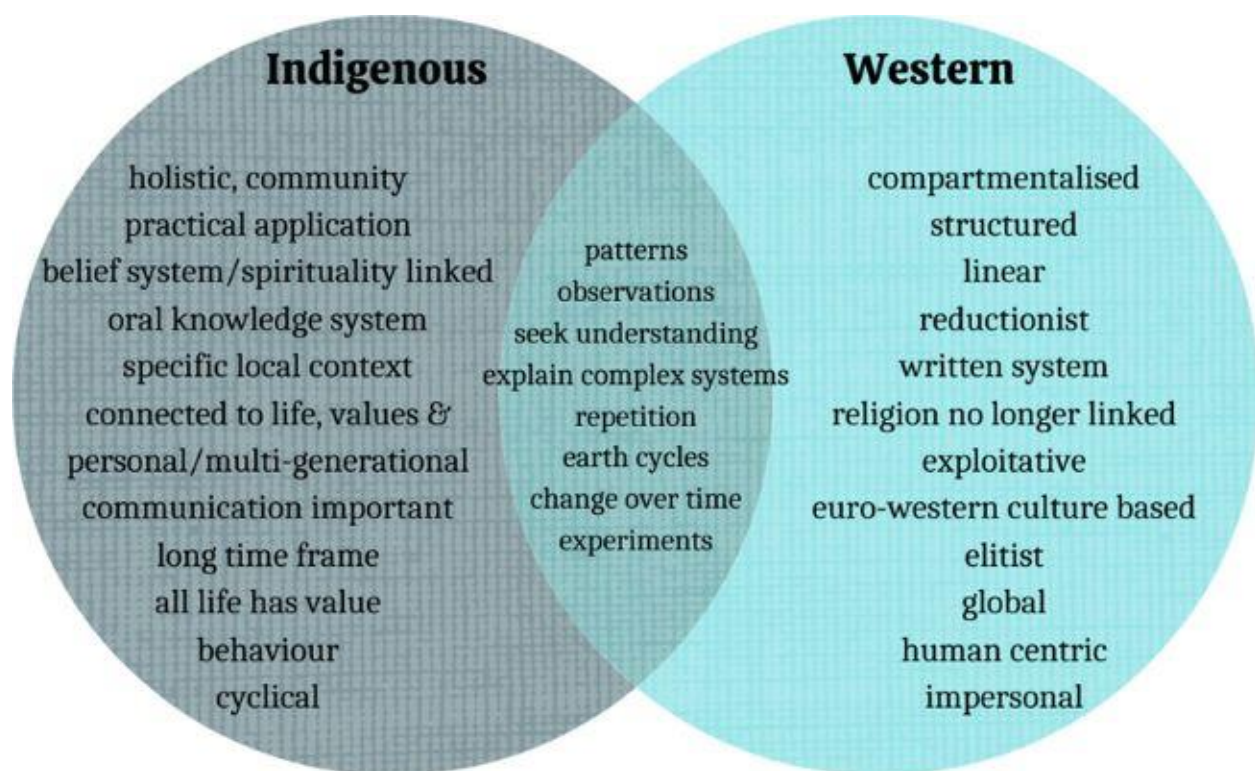
*Note.* Design from Candace Brunette-Debassige, *Indigenous Learning*, 2022, p. 4.

On the ground with, and perhaps in direct opposition to settler-colonialism and current neo-liberalism within the academy, Indigenous/Native Intelligence is another

seed from which this research grows. Unlike the Western or Euro-centric theories of education and learning, Indigenous Intelligence encompasses the whole being, like the medicine wheel—the body, the heart, the mind, and the spirit. In this theoretical shelter, exercising the mind (the intellect) by reading, writing, and testing memory is only a part of the whole. Considering how Indigenous Knowledge is acquired, organized, and utilized compared to the Western, academic-based Knowledge scaffolding, the Venn diagram below from Research Gate provides a visual:

**Figure 3**

*Comparisons of Indigenous and Western Worldviews*



*Note.* Taken from Research Gate, Comparisons of Indigenous and Western

Worldviews. Whilst these systems are different, there are many similarities between the different versions of information sharing.

While exploring and extrapolating from the existing theories of Tribal Critical Race Theory, Red Pedagogy, Kaupapa Māori, Indigenous Feminisms, and to a less prominent degree, Decolonizing and Postcolonial theories, I am fully engaged in participatory research methods. I am keenly aware of the need to explain happenings and things in the world through a system of ideas and analyses, as well as acknowledging the limitations of the dominant power structure as audience and in accepting findings as valid from Indigenous scholars, researchers, and thinkers. My lens is firmly situated within the Social Justice and Transformative paradigm, as this provides the scaffolding for considering inequality, injustice, and inequity within the theoretical frameworks, literature, and research. I argue that theories, as well as social and cultural practices and ideologies are set in time and place, waiting for re-examination and revisions as our lived experiences and world change.

### **Indigenous Methodologies**

Indigenous Methodologies build equity and reciprocal relationships between the researcher and participants simply because they are grounded in relationship and story. As Paolo Freire (1990) adamantly stated (and has become common knowledge/phraseology), the oppressor can never un-oppress or liberate the oppressed and to utilize this sentiment in relation to Indigenous Methodologies, I would posit that to research any topic touching upon Indigeneity, one cannot use anything other than Indigenous Methodologies. Indigenous Methodologies is “research by and for Indigenous Peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the tradition and

knowledges of those people” (Evans et al., 2008) and not research by and for the oppressor/colonizer.

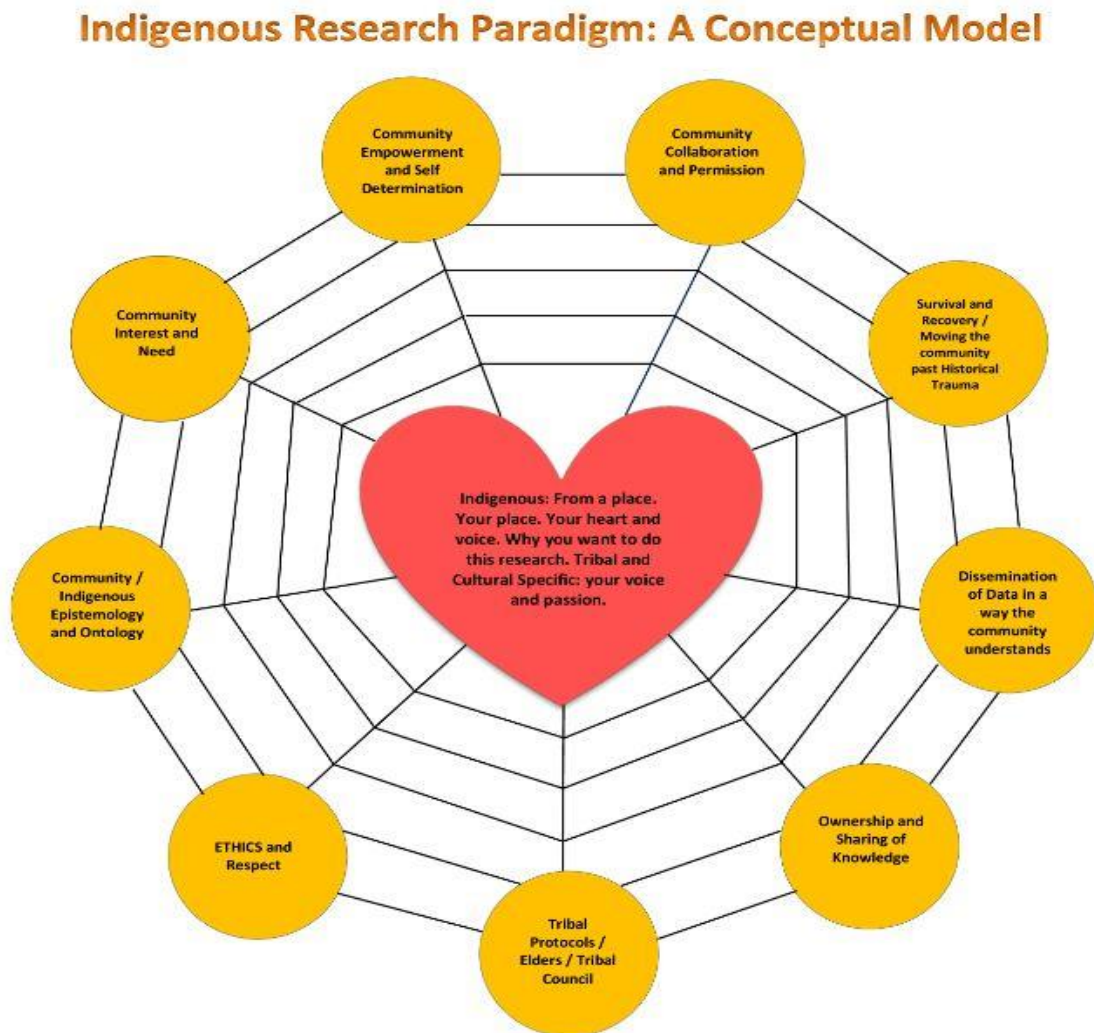
By using an Inductive Methodology within the framework of Indigeneity, I began my research with a focus group (talking circle) to examine my research questions about *What does identity politics and being Indigenous mean to you? How does identity politics impact you within the system of higher education? What is the role of identity politics for Indigenous people—politically, culturally, socially, academically?* The responses and discourse led to the weaving of the shape, size, and design of the basket that held the research from that point forth. This methodology eliminates the western practice of putting research data into pre-designed theoretical baskets, thus offering communal ownership and voice to the project, an Indigenous way of being—in action.

Research is the collection of data by a researcher, then the assessment and critical analysis of the data by the researcher culminating in the presentation of the final outcome of the data according to the researcher. Simplified description and appropriate to show that research is a tool to discover patterns within information that mean something. I am not being obtuse or vague but stating the facts without feeling. Research can be informative, didactic, evidential, and it can also be inaccurate, harmful, deceitful. It is not necessarily the research itself, but the researcher who holds the power here. It is not enough to state that as the researcher of this project, I promise to be in partnership with the research participants, follow cultural protocols when requesting, collecting, and disseminating data, or adhere to a code of ethics that values responsible and respectful relationships.

These are words and I want to put something more onto this page that shows I am reflexively thinking throughout this process. I grow stiff and sore pondering how, how, how until I reach for an anthology of Indigenous women writers and find this: "...I listen beyond my thoughts and the sounds I / have become familiar with..." (Fuhrman, 2022, "Weaving," lines 4-5). This is my promise.

In my personal work as a writer for many years, across genres, researching historical, cultural, and theoretical topics, in both the academic and the creative writing world and teaching undergraduate college courses on Composition and Rhetorical, Literature and Literature Reviews, and Research Methodologies, developing and revising curriculum, I hope has prepared me to engage with this research in only positive and open-minded ways. I typically do not write about utopias or wrap up with fairytale endings. I do not imagine this project to be any different; however, I feel hope when writing, even the darkest moments, and the same goes here. I will not shy away from the controversial, the ugly, the uncomfortable, nor will I spread doom. The stories are what they are; my inferences and interrogations are mine alone.

The figure below illustrates the ways of being that drive this research; the attention to intergenerational trauma and community needs and collaboration that remind me of the purpose of this research and who I am accountable to when conducting it.

**Figure 4***Indigenous Research Paradigm: A Conceptual Model*

To say I have been interested in identity would be accurate, as my chapbook, *ESCAPE GIRL BLUES* (Finishing Line Press, 2018), explored identity, resistance, and legacies through poetics. It is my belief that personal narratives—stories in various modalities—are our history and future. In my creative writing life, I am currently working on a project titled *Under the Flag* examining the history and impact of the 234 years of

settler-colonial government, the head of which is the United States President, from a female Indigenous lens. To further clarify, I am using sex, politics, and religion to draw out the what-ifs and the factual historical happenings across Indian Country under each President. Why this topic, and how does it integrate or connect with a doctoral research project? Identity is steeped in history, in story, and lives within the political layers of society. Identity is personal and communal. As cliché as it may be, how can we truly see or know ourselves without realizing the past, individually, and collectively?

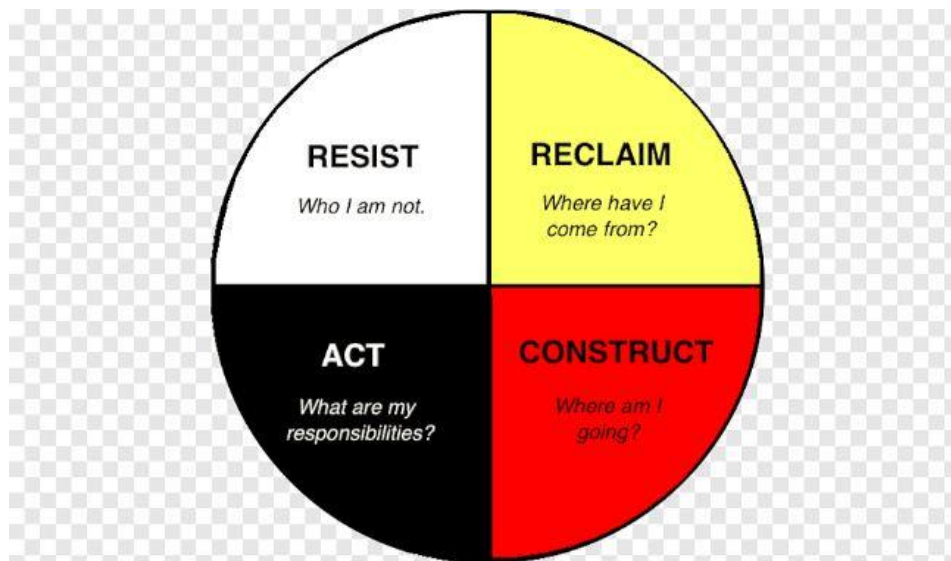
The medicine wheel/circle/four directions --this Indigenous circular ontology-- guides me in developing research methods (interview questions, survey questions, focus/talking circle groups), as well as provides the basis for my data interpretation and analysis. I consider the Medicine Wheel as a map, the cartography of histories, stories, and futures; a map of lives that circles, like our contemporary clock keeping time. One enters from the east where the sun rises and follows the circle clockwise, or sun wise, through the seasons of life, the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual essences of our total selves. The center symbolizes the integration and connection of all directions, all experiences, the totality of the journey.

If we rely on the linear mode of being and knowing, we disrupt the balance. Black Elk once said, "...everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the power of the World always works in circles..." (Neihardt, 1995, p 29). The model I choose to inform my research is a combination of the basic elements of the Medicine Wheel using the Four Directions and Circle of Life, not a direct representation of a specific Tribe, but as a direct representation of a universal Indigenous ideology—interconnectedness, balance, and life's journey, individually and communally.

As the figure below illustrates and exemplifies my personal methodology, connecting my past and ancestors with my present life and purpose, while knowing who I am and who I am not.

**Figure 5**

*Medicine Wheel/4 Directions/The Circle Guide*



### ***Kaupapa Māori Theory***

Māori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, uses a similar research design based on the Māori equivalent of the four directions and using the metaphor of ocean tides. She asserts, “From a Pacific peoples’ perspective, the sea is a giver of life, it sets time and conveys movement. Within the greater ebb and flow of the ocean are smaller localized environments which have enabled Pacific peoples to develop enduring relationships to the sea” (1999). The figure below shows the four directions to be Decolonization, Transformation, Mobilization, and Healing. The four major tides are Survival, Recovery, Development, and Self-Determination and “are the conditions and states of being

through which indigenous communities are moving. It is not sequential development – the survival of peoples as physical beings, of languages, of social and spiritual practices, of social relations and of the arts are all subject to some basic prioritizing” (Smith, 2012).

**Figure 6**

*The Indigenous Research Agenda*



Figure 2.1 The Indigenous Research Agenda (Source: Smith, 1999: 117).

Within the pages of *Decolonizing Methodologies* (Smith, 2012), there is a section titled “Insider/Outsider Research” that I grappled with. The standard research practice in the (dominant) academy is that the researcher is an outsider who is objectively gathering data around and about a thing they may have no knowledge, experience, or place in. Not until recently, have many of us in the academy concluded that the researcher—the actual human—is as integral in the research as the research itself, and not just from a reporting or analyzing, final product perspective.

As noted by Smith, “Most research methodologies assume that the researcher is an outsider, able to observe without being implicated in the scene.” Both outsider and insider researchers must critically think about their processes and quality of data and analysis; however, the insider researchers “have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities” (p. 138). It is a truth that I have insider status because I direct and teach within a Native American studies program; it is a truth that my ancestors are from Native America; it is also true that I do not live in my traditional homeland and, as such, am not of a local or regional tribe; and it is a truth that while I use Indigenous pedagogy, an Indigenous lens, develop and facilitate Indigenous curriculum, I received my higher education degrees (up to my doctor of philosophy) from traditional western institutions of higher learning.

Regardless of the consent, trust, and relationships that I have with the Indigenous communities and research participants, I am hesitant to refer to myself as an insider in the deepest sense of the concept, and yet when Smith (2012) talks about “choosing the margins,” my role as researcher and the accompanying categorizations of it make sense:

There are also researchers, scholars and academics who actively choose the margins, who choose to study people marginalized by society, who themselves have come from the margins or who see their intellectual purpose as being scholars who will work for, with, and alongside communities who occupy the margins of society...researchers who choose to research with and for

marginalized communities are often in the margins themselves in their own institutions, disciplines and research communities. (pp. 205-206)

I feel this and I live this; therefore, my role is of insider researcher as I value and observe the insider responsibilities during and after this project. I am only speaking about my experiences, personal and familial, and as an Indigenous researcher and good relative on a journey to make sense of identity politics and Indigeneity inside and outside the boundaries of higher education; I am not researching, analyzing, or sharing information as a tribal citizen or representing a tribe/nation.

If you are like me, perhaps you cringe when you hear yet another label or term for a thing that you feel, believe, practice already? But words and phrases, terminology and concepts, categories and labels create a place to dissect, question, critically evaluate, because if we cannot name a thing, we have a challenging time explaining the thing. Why would we need to explain anything to anyone? Because we live together on Mother Earth; because we must identify ourselves and our thoughts and our actions in order to claim agency and power; because the knee of the curve is upon us and if we do not, we risk being continually devalued, forgotten, erased.

What I appreciate in my research for this project is the praxis element found within the scholarly materials of Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2003, 2005, 2019), Leonie Pihama (2001, 2010, 2014, 2023), Linda Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 2012, 2019, 2022) Rangimarie Mahuika (2008, 2020), and especially explored in the myriad of critical conversations surrounding academia, Indigeneity, Indigenous ways of learning and teaching, and life with my mentor, Mera Penehira. For example, the following six principles of Kaupapa Māori praxis (within the education system):

1. **Tino Rangatiratanga** The principle of Self-determination or Relative Autonomy --essentially being in control of one's life by having greater autonomy over choices and decisions (they are the decision-makers) that reflect and impact Māori cultural, political, economic, and social preferences.

2. **Taonga tuku iho** The principle of validating and legitimating cultural aspirations and identity—there is little need to justify one's identity, Māori culture and values are validated and legitimated. There is authentic support for being and living Māori.

3. **Ako** The principle of incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy—teaching and learning is connected to cultural backgrounds and life circumstances (socio-economic) of Māori communities.

4. **Kia piki ake i nga raruraru o te kāinga** The principle of mediating socio-economic and home difficulties—is to draw on the social capital of the culturally collective practice to mitigate the negative impacts of debilitating socio-economic circumstances.

5. **Whānau** The principle of incorporating cultural structures which emphasize the 'collective' rather than the 'individual' such as the notion of extended family—the whanau (extended family structures and networks) takes collective responsibility to assist, intervene, and support individual members, and individual members reciprocate and 'invest' in the whānau.

6. **Kaupapa** The principle of a shared and collective vision/philosophy—a collective vision that guides the what and how for excellence in Māori education. (Smith, 2003, pp. 8-10)

Finding strong similarities between Kaupapa Māori and Native American theories and praxis is inspiring. We may use different words and terms, but the claiming space—physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritually within our colonized worlds is the same. We share a vision for the future.

### ***Indigenous Feminisms***

The guide of using Indigenous Feminisms entered mid-way when embarking on the ongoing unstructured interviews and talking circles. Upon revisiting the stories shared with me, I knew there was a common thread that I was not seeing. I returned to writings by Indigenous women and during a section of Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop: Recentering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*, I found the thread. There was a way of analysis and synthesis we all used that was seemingly invisible, a way of expression and viewing the world that is captured with:

Indigenous feminists reflect and capture the multiple ways in which gender and race, and therefore the systems of power related to these (sexism, racism, and colonialism) shape Indigenous peoples' lives. Indigenous feminists have the potential to expose and destabilize patriarchal gender roles and the structures that sustain and promote continued Indigenous dispossession and disempowerment through colonialism. (Nickel, 2020, p. 3)

This approach expands the circle of the story by being inclusive of balancing the intricate nuances of not only being Indigenous, but being an Indigenous woman, I have read that the Choctaw had a Council of Seven Grandmothers who, while decisions were being made, would silently observe and listen, then gather in a circle and place a stick in the center to indicate if they approved. All sticks in the center, or negotiations started again. Women's roles throughout history and cultures have been of the highest esteem for their particular wisdom and practices, and the Indigenous Feminist Intellect is one framework that can highlight this vital perspective in this research project. Many, if not most, of the Eastern tribes were matrilineal, meaning that the family line ran from the mother's lineage and not patrilineal, from the fathers. When we talk about European cultures being patriarchal, that is when fathers, eldest male sons, or men head and lead a society (families, governments), often exclusive of women and children. The opposite can be inferred from matriarchy—the wife, eldest daughter, or women are in charge of a society. It is important to note that Indigenous people who were matrilineal did not necessarily practice matriarchy or patriarchy for that matter, as these are Euro-centric concepts of power and control as opposed to kinship and familial descent.

From an Indigenous feminism lens, Gunn Allen presents that traditional societal structures of Native Americans were “more often gynocritic than not, and they are never patriarchal,” (1986, p. 2) and this concept of looking into the not so distant past to locate and position ways of being, that if brought forward into the future, either as a means of re-claiming or rejecting the white-supremist patriarchal systems of the modern society

we live within a disconcerting common refrain of *that's the way it used to be or times are different*—not in terms of cultural revival.

Some would argue that Native American culture is ever-present, does not need re-claiming, revival, or outside confirmation for validity. I argue that as there are millions of Native people on Turtle Island that live in vastly different geographical locations, they have just as many cultural differences as over-arching shared cultural practices—one being the common tradition of transmitting culture by oral storytelling (as opposed to documented records)--that perhaps it is worthwhile and prudent to adhere to the practice of cultural revival, from a time-honored tradition and practice— the Indigenous feminist point of view. As Gunn Allen (1886) states:

American Indians are not merely doomed victims of western imperialism or progress; they are also the carriers of the dream that most activist movements claim to be seeking. The major difference between most activist movements and tribal societies is that for millennia, American Indians have based their social systems, however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused worldviews.  
(p. 2)

The main point is that the Indigenous female was honored as a vital, valuable human being as opposed to the settler-colonial female counterpart viewed as inferior to man, a vessel for procreation and gratification, and valuable only as far as patriarchy allows. The ideological differences between Indigenous ways of knowing and being and Euro-centric ways of knowing and being could travel parallel forever, not hypothetically, but realistically, as long as the settler-colonial patriarchal mindset is most prevalent in the dominant society, the paths will collide and bifurcate.

***Tribal Critical Race Theory***

Similarly, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) as identified by scholar Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy (Lumbee), provides a strong footing for this research, and is outlined here:

TribalCrit begins by recognizing the unique, liminal position of American Indian tribal peoples in education and in their relationship to the U.S. government. The theory offers new ways to examine the concepts of theory, culture, knowledge, and power from the perspective of American Indian people and their communities. Ultimately, it seeks to build upon the strong foundation provided by CRT by specifically addressing the multiple, nuanced, and historically located experiences of tribal peoples today.

The basic tenets of the theory can be summarized as follows:

1. Colonization is endemic to U.S. society.
2. U.S. policies toward Indigenous peoples are rooted in imperialism, colonization, white supremacy, and a desire for material gain.
3. Indigenous peoples occupy a liminal space that accounts for both the political and the racialized nature of our identities.
4. Indigenous peoples have a desire to obtain and forge tribal sovereignty, tribal autonomy, self-determination, and self-identification.
5. The concepts of culture, knowledge, and power take on new meaning when examined through an Indigenous lens.

6. Governmental policies and educational policies toward Indigenous peoples closely follow each other toward a problematic goal of assimilation.

7. Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples; they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups.

8. Stories are not separate from theory; they make up theory and are, therefore, real and legitimate sources of data and ways of being.

9. Theory and practice are connected in deep and explicit ways such that scholars must work towards social change. (2006, pp. 430-431)

Tenet 8 is a refrain during the process of this research and is a direct path of honoring the research participants as they share their “real and legitimate” stories. Locating this sentiment within relational epistemology presented a very lively discourse between talking circle participants, inevitably leading down the proverbial rabbit hole of pretendianism, investigated in later chapters.

The idea of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) is not an offshoot of Critical Race Theory (CRT); it is more of an expansion or reframing of CRT through an Indigenous or Tribal lens. A worldview that is:

Rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically—and geographically—located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities. Though they differ depending on time, space, place, tribal nation, and individual, there appear to be commonalities in those ontologies and epistemologies. TribalCrit is rooted in these commonalities while simultaneously recognizing the range and variation

that exists within and between communities and individuals. (Brayboy, 2006, p. 428)

When I consider the tenets that Brayboy works this theory out from and the intersection between the individual and the community within Indigenous groups, the argument that formulates is that this is what Pan-Indianism was meant to encompass and address—the commonalities between separate tribes and acknowledging the differences but not from a deficit model.

Brayboy further asserts, and I concur, that for scholars to effect social change, they must include both theory and praxis. CRT works from the primary premise that racism is endemic in society, while TribalCrit posits that “colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2001). Like the common riddle, what came first--the chicken or the egg, to answer what came first—racism or colonization--depends on the respondents' lived experience and worldview.

From listening to stories, reading origin and historical stories, and practicing critical analysis, I maintain that colonization is the vehicle that moves racism (and classism) around. Racism and classism exist outside of colonization. However, to understand how racism and classism become rooted is to follow the trail of colonization. Once colonization, and more specifically settler-colonization occur, the seeds of racism and classism spread, and the roots are easily covered and eradication near impossible.

### ***Red Pedagogy***

The concept of self-determination--some say this started in 1968 with the Indian Civil Rights Act which in essence forced the US Constitution onto tribal governments,

under the guise of protecting all citizens; others will argue this era began in 1975 with the Self-Determination Act—is typically approached through liberal democracy because “from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onward, that is the context under which tribal sovereignty in the US has developed” (Pittman, 2023). The Self-Determination Era that we are still operating in, is the ongoing attempt to make or force the US government to reconcile with the multitude of atrocities committed against Native Americans. The vehicles for seeking this reckoning, and change, are political and civil.

Sandy Grande (2012) states:

A number of seminal political documents were also published during the era of self-determination, including the ‘Indian Nations at Risk’ report in 1991, the ‘White House conference on Indian education’ report in 1992, and the ‘Comprehensive Federal Indian Education Policy Statement’ in 1997, and the ‘Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education’ in 1998....the reports testified to the fact that centuries of genocidal and assimilationist policies cannot be undone in a matter of years. The voices of prominent American Indian scholars, educators, and leaders are registered throughout, collectively asserting that systematic oppression, levied at the hands of the federal government, requires an equally systematic federal plan of affirmative action. In other words, an education for decolonization. (p.17)

Key considerations from the passage above are that the root of the issues, from true tribal sovereignty to a decolonized education, are the systems that govern and the seeds of white-supremist, Christian ideologies that grow the systems. Nothing can be separated from the whole if we are to argue for, fight for, and make change. Systems

can be altered, destroyed, rearranged just like roots can, but the ideological worldview? What about those seeds? Utilizing red pedagogy is to deeply engage with the histories and impacts of settler-colonialism from a collective and Indigenous viewpoint while examining the intersections of Indigenous ways of knowing and being within the western paradigm. In a recent interview, Grande (2022), when discussing Indigenous analytics and “undoing the individual,” frames the concept most beautifully by considering the Land Back movement in this way:

It is taking land back, but it is also about taking seriously land as a relation or water as a relation and all other than human beings as our relations. It's not just about how we care for these relatives. We start with an understanding that it is us who belongs to them, but what is it that they teach us about how to live in the world? So, the source of knowledge is completely different, and it is a radical decentering of the human.

One of the major points of practicing in the realm of red pedagogy is to provide and protect the space for Indigenous knowledge and practices within academia; spaces that continually and ideologically work from epistemologies of erasure, through devaluation, false narratives, western pedagogical frameworks, and supporting structures of systematic, ongoing racism. I understand this concept of un-centering the human in terms of this research project as putting equal attention on all aspects and elements that create the research—looking to the Medicine Wheel or Circle as a guide through which the theories of red pedagogy can come alive. As the researcher, I am un-centered because of the methodologies and purpose of this project; I am a vulnerable

collaborator in comradeship with the others, human and non-human, that are creating this story with me.

### ***Methods***

The methods I chose to implement were more of a they-chose-me organic happening. I had an opaque idea of how collecting data would happen. I knew I wanted/needed to use oral storytelling but was not clear on exactly how; I wanted interviews that were more like life sharing time spent together; I wanted talking circles that my collaborators felt heard and free to say whatever they felt, even if tangential. I began by researching other Indigenous scholarly work and thoughts around a mixed methods approach from an Indigenous worldview, but also wanted to be mindful and knowledgeable of western methods for times of intersection. For example, I read this from Wilma Mankiller (1993) talking about women's roles in the Cherokee Nation:

In our tribal stories, we have heard of a Women's Council, which was headed by a very powerful woman, perhaps the Ghigau. This oral history is frequently discredited by Western historians as "merely myth." I have always found their repudiation fascinating. An entire body of knowledge can be dismissed because it was not written, while material written by obviously biased men is readily accepted as reality. No wonder our written history speaks so often of war but rarely records descriptions of our songs, dances, and simple joy of living. The voices of our grandmothers are silenced by most of the written history of our people. (pp. 21-20)

Rhetoric is purposeful language used to motivate, persuade, and educate others. It is tool to influence audiences, thus being mindful of rhetoric and the role it plays in society—from defining the uses of identity politics, perpetuating genocidal practices, presenting findings of research, as well as having the power to create authentic narratives for Indigenous peoples. Rhetoric is a method I will apply from a sincere and Indigenous perspective throughout this research.

My positionality will be examined by including an auto-ethnographic account of the relationship between myself and the research topic. Exploring the concepts of identity and Indigeneity through the political lens, differentiates between the notion of self-determined identity and tribal self-determined identity by opening the conversation and identifying patterns and intersections.

Indigenous Methodology guides my Mixed Methods research approach to provide cultural integrity and intellectual rigor, as well as provide the awareness and acknowledgment of the scrutiny, complexity, and responsibility that attaches to Indigenous researchers and researching topics that impact Indigenous communities. As an Indigenous researcher, it is my main priority to analyze and report my findings with respect and authentic representation of the research participants; furthermore, it is my duty to provide accessibility to review the data analysis, provide revisions as necessary, and make available the final findings to the communities and people that have supported and contributed to “our” work. The choice to use mixed methods of qualitative and quantitative data collection keeps in line with working from a grounded theory premise to create an opportunity for the research to expand or contract with the data

collected. While the methods I use are heavily weighted in the qualitative story-work model, the inclusion of quantitative data is used to provide scope and accountability.

*Methods used included:*

- a focus group/talking circle--informal discussion around the research question then moved into a semi-formal circle with guided questions generated from the initial discussion
- talking circles— informal and semi-formal with equal participation between the participants and the researcher
- One-on-one personal interviews—semi-formal structure
- Personal interviews—formal, written questions, written responses, closed and open-ended questions
- Survey—on-line, formal, closed questions
- Literature review
- Archival document review
- Poetics
- Cartography/maps

***Analysis Methods***

This research is exploratory, and methods of analysis become more developed and reassessed throughout the research process; therefore, thematic, and narrative analysis will be used to present the findings, as well as the observations as both a participant-observer and as a semi-formal interviewer. Observations were documented

in bullet points during each meeting with the research participants and include facets of emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual observances as they manifested and were identified from my point of view--none of which are included in this research without explicit approval and permission by the participants. Thematic groupings, concept/mind-mapping, Venn diagraming, and computer-generated word clouds were used to organize and identify specific commonalities or differences in the data.

### **The People: Research Collaborators**

This research relies on the elements of Relationality and Reciprocity inherently woven into the bonds of axiology so that all stories are valued, respected, and interconnected. The introduction to the demographics of the research participants, or collaborators, as more accurately describes their role, outlines the generational scope within this research. The questions from semi-structured interviews and guiding questions during talking circles will be transparent. From my ongoing anecdotal narrative, my worldview and lived experiences are highlighted to show the process of systems thinking, cultural awareness, positionality, and personal authority when collected data is analyzed and articulated, in addition to the stated biases, boundaries, and limitations of this research.

To conceive of a research project as heart-work is to call upon so many others' beautiful, awe-inspiring, thought-provoking work as a guide because identity and education, the very essence of the words with all the encumbrances, ambiguities, divisiveness, and trauma also embody the essence of hope, love, futurism, and community.

My view of methodologies is one of fluidity. There is not a singular system of prescribed methods that I use to gather data; an Indigenous Methodology culls practices from more than one Indigenous think circle, yet includes standard methods of pre, during, and post data collection that are grounded in community-research ideologies, Native American Seventh generation ideology, and Indigenous ontologies. For example, what may start as an interview becomes a talking circle because that is the direction all involved move it. I am not holding to a pre-conceived or contrived idea of when the time will end, nor how the time will be spent with the research collaborators, unlike a defined and structured interviewing method.

As true with most Indigenous cultures, participants were fed when in person and gifted for their time and contributions. Names of participants will be anonymous unless explicit permission is given to this researcher to include identifying information. A guiding principle in this Indigenous research is to practice relational accountability with the knowledge that we are interconnected with each other and to all living things in the world. Methods used will be thoroughly explained and examined in this chapter and include personal interviews, talking circles, open-ended and closed questionnaires, surveys, archival documents, cartography, and oral storytelling. The collaborators are from federally enrolled tribes, descendants of tribes, descendants of Indigenous Mexican and South American groups, college students, college graduates, and faculty at the college-level. Specific details surrounding the participants and data collection will be provided when the information and findings are presented in Sections II and III of this research.

All collaborators signed consent forms before the start of any data being collected that included a packet of information about the research project, my intentions with the research project (publication of parts or whole), resources for mental health wellbeing, my methods for analysis, an open invitation for further discussion, and timeline for reviewing of my data analyses, final findings. As true with most Indigenous cultures, participants were fed when in person and gifted for their time and contributions.

Gunn Allen (1992) introduces a theme that courses throughout academia, one as Indigenous scholars we know and live, articulate within our work, and that is: “Western studies of American Indian tribal systems are erroneous at base because they view tribalism from the cultural bias of patriarchy and thus either discount, degrade, or conceal gynocritic features or recontextualize those features so that they will appear patriarchal” (p. 4) The collaborators of my research story are primarily women, self-identified, from across generational divides, tribal relevancies, and different lived experiences; I did not start out to create this leaning toward the female voice, meaning that I originally envisioned a somewhat equal binary of male and female. Guided by theories found within Indigenous feminisms, I was curious about the information and data provided by the males and how to assess and evaluate the findings through this lens. I believe that to the best of my abilities, the unfolding of the collaborator’s stories has escaped the narrow, mainstream understanding of male and female, and located this research firmly within an authentic Indigenous worldview, one decidedly marked by equitable and balanced (not equal) contributions of female, male, and non-binary identifying participants.

***Collaborative limitations***

Indigenous and tribal participants place-based in Western Washington, posing a limitation in scope of diverse Indigenous /tribal collaborators from the perspective of land-place-culture and lived experience. The two-year (and continuing) halt in our daily lives because of the COVID-19 pandemic, plus the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual toll on so many, directly impacted this research.

***Limitations & Considerations***

The following are what I consider to be limitations and/or considerations when approaching this research, as a reader:

- Participants/collaborators from a homogeneous group of higher education faculty staff and students;
- resistance and fear of identity politics within Indigenous communities defined through a binary of social\ cultural and political\ economical;
- limited literature regarding the topics of identity politics within Native Indigenous America
- in North America, as defined by the contemporary boundaries of the United States of America, only federally recognized enrolled tribal members/citizens are legal, political Indians with protected rights

## Closing Reflections

By examining and referencing all the brilliant theorists and practitioners of Indigenous Methodologies, this research benefits from a grounded and integrated approach that is realized and centered through an Indigenous lens. The talking circle and interview questions were developed using the frameworks presented in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Bryan McKinley Jones Brayboy's tenets of Tribal Critical Race Theory, Sandy Grande's *Red Pedagogy*, and the premise of Indigenous Feminisms that posits female ways of knowing and being as vital for big-picture coherence in research methodologies.

The concept of connection, relationship, and reciprocity are the foundations for following the four principles of Relational Ontology as set forth by Shawn Wilson (2001) and Cora Weber-Pillwax (1999), which calls for all aspects of Indigenous research to be accountable, responsible, respectfully represent research participants and data analysis, and practice reciprocal appropriation. The culmination of my research project is a direct response and reflection to the trust, respect, reciprocity, and relationships between myself, as a human being and as an Indigenous researcher, and the research collaborators.

To conceive of a research project as heart-work is to call upon so many others' beautiful, awe-inspiring, thought-provoking work as a guide because identity and education, the very essence of the words with all the encumbrances, ambiguities, divisiveness, and trauma also embody the essence of hope, love, futurism, and community. I began by hosting a focus group to test the validity of my research question, as well as gauge if it was as compelling and complex as I imagined it to be.

The subsequent years of talking circles, interviews, surveys, reviewing and developing a possible explanation or direction forward or understanding, then more talking circles and interviews have been a fascinating deep dive journey into the world of Indigenous identity politics, academia, tribalographies, family histories, genocidal practices and impacts, and the beauty of the human body, mind, heart, and spirit to hold memory and make sense of an often senseless world through story telling.

**SECTION II: SOUTH & HEART****Amoroleck's Words**

*You can't take a man's words.*

*They are his even as the land*

*is taken away*

*where another man*

*builds his house.*

--Linda Hogan

You must've been a sight, Captain John Smith

as your dugout approached

with Jamestown's men

sporting plumed hats,

poufed knickers, beards, stockings,

funny little shoes.

You might have looked, to us,

well,

*uncivilized.*

We fought you, we know,

because you wrote it down.

One man was left behind. Wounded.

At your mercy. Among your shining goods—

mirrors, knives, firearms, glass beads—  
where was mercy? Maybe you left it  
in England. Eager to learn, Captain Smith,  
you asked about the worlds he knew,  
whether there was gold,  
why his people had fought  
when you came to them “in love.”  
He told you in his dialect,  
which no one now speaks.  
You recorded his name. His words.  
Not his fate.  
Of all the words our people spoke  
in the year of your Lord 1608,  
only his answer remains:  
*“We heard that you were a people  
come from under the world,  
to take our world from us.”*

--Karenne Wood, 2018, p. 229-230

### **CHAPTER THREE | INDIGENOUS IDENTITY & POLITICS, POV**

This chapter gets into the weeds of identity politics and point of view (POV), for the conversation cannot be complete, nor purposeful without understanding the who, what, when, where, why, and how, or in simpler terminology, the backstory, as we would say in creative writing. The backstory is an exposition that gathers potentially disparate pieces into a cartography of story. It is not sufficient to know the trajectory of identity politics from inception to now without knowing what was going on from a socio-political and socio-economic standpoint for all stakeholders. Identity politics is defined by *Merriam-Webster* as “politics in which groups of people having a particular racial, religious, ethnic, social, or cultural identity tend to promote their own specific interests or concerns without regard to the interests or concerns of any larger political group,” and another, expanded definition from *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is:

The laden phrase “identity politics” has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination.

When looking through a lens of politics, identity becomes both a mobilization strategy and a tool of oppression. Politics correlates with government and governing-- the essence of which is power and control. The power to be an Indian or Indian tribe lies with the U.S. Federal Government, not state governments, not tribal governments, not a council of elders. Federally recognized tribal members or citizens are the only people who can legitimately claim Indian identity. It is the sovereign right of each tribe to decide their enrollment criteria and practices. It is my belief that identity politics is becoming the matrix of cultural identity for Indigenous peoples through the lens of the dominant culture and that the systems of racism, classism, capitalism, religion, and settler-colonialism created the contemporary practice of identity politics that is not intended for the equitable inclusion of Indigenous people but to subversively thwart Indigenous empowerment, sovereignty, and progress.

The persistence of identity politics worries many people. The problem is not with diversity of ethnic or religious lifestyles as such...However, attitudes become more anxious—even hostile—when these identity groups become politically mobilized and make claims for rights and recognition. (Bowen, 2018)

Since time immemorial when Indigenous groups mobilize to protect or fight for their inherent rights and, by proxy, recognition, they have been subjected to slaughter, imprisonment, forced assimilation through western education, and removal from their homelands. The concepts of colonialism, settler-colonialism, and decolonization will be found throughout this project. For the purposes of anchoring these concepts to the place of this research, the following definitions will be used: “colonialism as a form of structured dispossession” (Coulthard, 2014, p.7) emphasizing and reflecting on Karl

Marx's works linking capital with colonialism; I offer another element and way to digest the concept and practice of colonialism—from an Indigenous Feminist perspective: “patriarchy isn't just entwined with the systems of colonization, white supremacy, and capitalism. Colonization, white supremacy, and capitalism need patriarchy to work” (Gearon, 2021). Settler-colonialism for purposes of this research is the dominant, living system—not a singular event—those practices within the white supremacy, patriarchal, and vertical power structure over the people.

How do Indigenous peoples navigate and establish their identity and belonging in settler-colonized spaces, despite inaccurate historical narratives, and within the guarded machinations of the dominant politics? The question is not whether Indigenous people have inherent and acquired sovereignty, it is how Indigenous people act upon, claim, or resist acquisition of those rights.

I posit the argument that with the unprecedented technological advances and rapid globalization, Indigenous communities must address a long-standing and ongoing controversy over the practices of determining who is tribal/Indigenous and who is not. Across Turtle Island, the idea of Pan-Indianism is not viewed as a proactive or positive tool, as it was before the term caught the cultural wave and morphed into the modern distrustful and disdainful concept—following the 1960s and 70s, during the time of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and Civil Rights Movement.

Pan-Indianism is defined by *the English Dictionary* as an adjective “denoting or relating to a cultural movement or religious practice participated in by many or all North American Indian peoples.” Following the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act, Zitkala Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin) organized the National Council of American Indians to

empower Indians to vote, as she saw the writing on the wall, *per se*, and understood that in order to protect and expand Indian civil rights, Indians needed to be political activists. This organization ultimately failed for lack of participation, but in 1944 the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) emerged and many of the founders were Oklahoma Choctaw or Cherokee. The NCAI is still strong today, working across Indian Country to protect and advance Indian rights and sovereignty (Oklahoma History). Pan-Indianism, at its core, is a social and political movement that serves to unite tribal and Indigenous people across Turtle Island regardless of separate tribal cultures. In the current social-cultural-political climate, an argument against Pan-Indianism is the mythologizing of multiple tribal entities, peoples, and nations into a conglomerate that presents itself as one universal way of doing or being; this view is perhaps one of conjecture by simplifying the concept.

Considering the first Native person to have the right of *habeas corpus*—“a fundamental right in the Constitution that protects against unlawful and indefinite imprisonment. Translated from Latin, it means “show me the body” (ACLU) was the Ponca Chief and civil rights activist Standing Bear, could indicate a valid claim that a certain amount of Pan-Indianism works for the good of all Indians. This case was successfully argued in Omaha, Nebraska during the year of 1879 and gave civil rights to *all* Native Americans to be considered actual, as literally, human beings who have the writ of *habeas corpus*. Indigenous identity politics were front and center less than 150 years ago.

Identity politics has become the perfect storm(ing)-- people, generally large groups, based on cultural, traditional, ethnic, religious, and other identifying factors join

together to form a political alliance, generally to fight oppression or gain political power by enacting a larger (and louder) voice. The concept and practice of identity politics within modern society did not take root until the 1970s with the rise of many political and social justice movements such as second wave feminism, the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Combahee River Collective of Black feminists, to name a few. It would be unwise to dismiss the contemporary role of intersectionality, both an ontology and a method, that supposes:

A central tenet is that no axis of identity can be understood as separable from others—whether in terms of individual experience or the political structures that underlie social stratification. To the extent that identity politics urges mobilization around a single axis, it will put pressure on participants to identify that axis as their defining feature, when in fact they may well understand themselves as integrated selves who cannot be represented so selectively or deductively.

(Heyes, 2020)

It is also of import to include the theory of intersectionality when critically analyzing the beast of identity politics. The term was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in 1989 and in contemporary times, some thirty years later, this mostly obscure explanation for how oppressed groups of people cannot be viewed simply by single identifiers, the backlash has begun. A note on social justice and backlash: the pattern is well-attended to throughout history, where a term or issue is recognized by the few working for change, then the general population finds it, abuses it, dissects it, reorganizes it for their own purposes and agenda, and the concept itself becomes diluted and powerless within the

dominant society. Crenshaw (2020) has this to say about intersectionality in modern times:

Intersectionality is simply about how certain aspects of who you are will increase your access to the good things or your exposure to the bad things in life. Like many other social-justice ideas, it stands because it resonates with people's lives, but because it resonates with people's lives, it's under attack. There's nothing new about defenders of the status quo criticizing those who are demanding that injustices be addressed. It's all a crisis over a sense that things might actually have to change for equality to be real. (Steinmetz, 2020)

For example, the intersection of tribal status, socio-economic status, race, and gender all contribute to creating the holistic and more accurate identity of a person, thus providing a more coherent and clear understanding of the social issues impacting this person. I am looking through a lens of social justice in this example; the lens of how mainstream society and systems oppress certain groups of people.

### **Political Vehicle of Power**

Identity politics being a political vehicle indicates the importance of understanding that in the United States, the federal government only recognizes 574 tribes including the 229 Alaskan Native villages, leaving perhaps 500 (if one considers there were estimated to be over 1000 various bands, pueblos, and clans at contact) federally unrecognized tribes without sovereign rights or recognized political identity. And as federally recognized tribes have sovereignty, albeit limited, they choose who and how to enroll or dis-enroll, many mirror eradication and termination practices of the U.S.

government, such as blood quantum and proof of lineage/Indian blood through documentation on rolls administered by federal government agents.

The statistical data available does not account for the countless original Indigenous peoples belonging to tribes, bands, or clans that were swallowed by war and removal policies, or hid their Indigenous identity as a means of survival. Understanding that authenticity and legitimacy are real issues that face Native nations across the land, my role as the researcher and author is to provide the findings as they are presented, without my assumptions, worldview, or values unless indicated in my analysis of the data. I am cognizant of the underpinnings of the settler-colonial mindset, oppression of information and ideas that threaten the status quo, and educational trauma that permeates generation after generation of Indigenous people. Identity politics changes in context and meaning depending on whose point-of-view (POV) is telling the story.

I met an elder once, a woman who stated she was a full-blood (without prompting), then proceeded to tell me stories of intermarried Indians and how nobody ever tells the “love stories”—those Indian women who married white men for love. I smiled because those are the stories of my family, my ancestors, yet I know the other stories too--of forced marriage and assimilation and economic marriages and survival marriages. The story of myself being that I loved and love who I do. Being married to a near full-blood Scandinavian whom the elder intently assessed as he sat across from her, she leaned forward asking, “You Indian?” He smiled and said, “no.” The elder laughed loud and beautiful then pointing at me asked, “You sleep with her?” We all laughed, he said “uh-huh,” and she said, “Well, then you’re part Indian.” What does this mean? It is just a tiny thread of a billion conversations and interactions and still, I felt

she gave us a gift, a lesson. He is not Native; he has his own ancestors, history, and culture. Yet, we have braided our lives together.

Therefore, who are we? Are Indigenous Peoples an amalgamation of cultural and political beings; not because we have given ourselves this role, but because to be visible, empowered, and legitimate on the political and social landscape that ultimately shapes our destinies and legacies as Indigenous Peoples, we must find the elixir to status quo, a feat that cannot be accomplished by standing alone. The concept of belonging to a band, clan or kinship group was not original until the advent of the United States of America for Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island but the policies of organizing into specific and distinctly politically recognized areas were. Barker (2011) discusses the way identity politics around “Indian Tribe” and Constitutional rendering happened during the time leading up to the genocidal Trail of Tears:

Recognition policies derive from the interpretation of the Constitution’s ‘Indian Tribe’ by the Supreme Court in the decisions known as the Marshall Trilogy: *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823); *Cherokee v. Georgia* (1831); and *Worcester v. Georgia* (1832). (p. 29)

These cases in the highest court in the (colonized) land, demonstrated the ideology that would plague (pun not intended) the Indigenous “Indian Tribes” throughout the next two centuries. As Chief Justice John Marshall defined the relationship between the U.S. federal government and the tribes as one in which the federally recognized tribes were “domestic dependent nations” and the U.S. was the ultimate authority and protector of the tribes. Barker (2011) elaborates on the reality of the Marshall rulings:

The recognition of 'Indian Tribes,' then, was not about recognizing the character of tribes—as metaphysical beings or through extra-political truths there to be seen and described as Marshall claimed to be doing. Obviously, tribes were not uncivilized infidels wandering over an untouched wilderness, taking brief respites in their otherwise busy days of hunting and gathering to sign treaties for aid and protection with their newly adopted great white father. The recognition of 'Indian Tribes' was instead about the United States establishing its absolute authority to recognize tribes as dependent and uncivilized then subjugating them as such to its power. (p.33)

It is an age-old colonizer tool to structure a vertical relationship between leader and subject where the leader (oppressor) steals something of value (resources, culture, life) then issues, to the subjects (the oppressed) promises of compensation (like basic human needs for survival) and most of the time, throughout history, fails to provide anything other than an agenda designed to benefit one entity: the colonizer. Barker posits that through these four acts of articulation—recognition, membership, disenrollment, and tradition, all under the watchful eye of the federal plenary power, can fundamentally alter the ways in which people are inherently culturally authentic. In the pursuit of origin, she states that “it pretends the possibility of knowledge and authenticity before history and change affected them—narrating knowledge and culture as if they can be pure or contaminated, sacred or profane, found or lost” (Barker, 2011, p. 221). Using Barker’s four acts of articulation as they are separate and intersecting components of claims and rights to Indigeneity, I reflect upon two common refrains regarding claiming Indigenous identity on Turtle Island. I use the term *claiming* only as

the act of identifying oneself from a social and cultural perspective, and not as a “status Indian” (enrolled, card-carrying tribal citizen) because that is my frame of reference, and I do not claim to be a citizen of my ancestral tribes.

When discussing the criteria of claiming Indigenous or tribal roots, one faction simply says if a person is enrolled with their tribe, their federally recognized tribe; and the other says if a person is accepted by their tribe and practices “the culture,” regardless of being enrolled. These are simplified renderings of longer, more complex conversations. However, the point I make is that, for many, the proof of being authentically Native American is possessing a tribal enrollment card. And this is true, from a political standpoint. One is only considered Native American (which is a political not racial category of being) if they are enrolled in a federally recognized tribe. This does not indicate a person’s connection to culture, participation in community, or even knowledge of their tribal ways. The latter viewpoint might *feel* better and more accepting, but is not inclusive of adoptees, urban Indians, or any other governmental policy or interpersonal reason a Native person(s) did not grow up with or in their community.

The unrecognized, the un-and dis-enrolled, and those treated as undesirable or dangerous—like mixed-race, queer people, and women (not necessarily mutually exclusive)—have paid the highest price for how Native legal status and rights are defined and asserted by Native peoples. And those consequences are real. They go to the health and well-being of whole families and individuals who are expunged or silenced in the name of righteousness and justice of Native sovereignty and self-determination. (Barker, 2011, p. 218)

I can self-identify as all the parts that make me a whole person, and I can practice Indigenous ideologies and ways of being; however, as a single star in the sky, I am without agency to create a paradigm shift that resonates beyond my immediate sphere of influence and community. Identity—who and what a person or group is or is not—is nothing new or extraordinary to the human experience. *Chahta si hoke*: I am Choctaw. But not legally, and most certainly not as a tribal citizen, not as a politically empowered Indian. I am also many other stories, survivals, and people that led to my existence. Because of my skin color and outward physical appearance, I have experienced many questions, many labels, many assumptions, many cocked-head-brow-furrowed assessments. These experiences gather in my mind, body, heart, and spirit, but I know who and what I am. That is not to say that how others perceive you is not valuable; however, I adamantly assert that these outside perceptions do not truly know you and what you carry within.

To use identity politics as a vehicle of change and tool of power or empowerment, we all must come together as a united group, in solidarity. We cannot afford to languish in colonized mindsets of competition and disenfranchisement. If we subscribe to the “othering” of our own, our self-determination erodes. Identity politics is fraught with binaries all enforced by the white settler-colonial powers for the purpose of division and weakening the legitimacy of the group. Identity politics for Indigenous Americans is reaching another full circle; what began as a way to eradicate and diminish the Indian population during the major, visible genocide era is slowly, much more insidiously circling back to 1) paper genocide, 2) division intra and intertribally, and 3) political economies taking precedent over social/cultural sovereignty. Identity politics

is political. And political entities have not given Indigenous peoples survival; Indigenous peoples have enacted their survival, despite the political mechanisms that have served to destroy them. If history threatens to repeat, when do we learn our lesson, and who are our teachers?

The dominant political and socio-economic powers drive the concept of identity into a political definer that serves to further their purpose of limiting Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, thus perpetuating the very idea of Indigenous identity and belonging to where indigenous peoples adopt and practice these imposed rules, thus perpetuating the belief that indigenous assimilation to the dominant culture is the best way to “settle” or colonize a land. The controversy of who is and who is not Indigenous, across borders, oceans, and nations, when viewed through the lens of capitalism and global economics, plays directly into the hands (and bank accounts) of the colonizers. The creation of membership by the over-ruling culture, regardless of the sovereign rights of nations to determine their own membership guidelines and practices, is often ignored in modern times. For example, on the BIA governmental website, it states that:

As foreign powers’ presence expanded and with the establishment and growth of the United States, tribal populations dropped dramatically and tribal sovereignty gradually eroded. While tribal sovereignty is limited today by the United States under treaties, acts of Congress, Executive Orders, federal administrative agreements and court decisions, what remains is nevertheless protected and maintained by the federally recognized tribes against further encroachment by other sovereigns, such as the states. Tribal sovereignty ensures that any

decisions about the tribes with regard to their property and citizens are made with their participation and consent. (2017)

After carefully analyzing the passage, it is clear that the federally recognized tribes in the U.S. have limited sovereignty and the federal government has the ultimate or plenary power to help or hinder a tribe. It is still a relationship of a parent and a child, reminiscent of the great white fathers (founding) during the creation of the United States.

### ***Declaring the Founding, and Subsequent Loss***

From the get-go, I take issue with the notion that *anything* was founded by fathers. The female body is the vessel and creator of life and, through the lens of Indigeniety and Indigenous Feminism and Tribal Critical Theory, no fathers would exist without mothers, create any social or political entity without women, or be viewed as all-powerful, omniscient. We would be remiss to not mention, and cohesively but concisely, examine the founders' ideology as it has tragically, across time and space, altered the lives of all the original peoples of Turtle Island (and beyond). The founders—all white, all male, all Christian, all non-Indigenous to the land, all settler-colonizers—Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison, John Adams, George Washington, and Alexander Hamilton (the only one to not become a president, although his bust is on the ten dollar bill). These are the main dudes who get most of the credit and recognition and signed the Declaration of Independence (among others). All owned slaves except for John Adams and all, with no exceptions, perpetuated genocide against Indigenous Americans. And for further context, Thomas Jefferson who was President from 1801-

1809, owned the most slaves of any president, estimated at 600 and the only one close to him in slave ownership was Andrew Jackson, who was President 1829-1837, also known as the Trail of Tears Indian killer, with an estimated 200 (Andrews, 2019). Jackson (the former 45th U.S. President's favorite past president—his giant portrait replaced Abraham Lincoln in the Oval Office), was one of the biggest bait and switch traitors to tribes and the original peoples living east of the Mississippi; he is responsible for the violent removal and eradication of many Indigenous Peoples who existed in what we know refer to as the Southeast. The following poem I wrote addresses the founding fathers, through the lens of an Indigenous woman:

***FOUNDING FATHERS, IF I WAS YOUR LOVER***

I'd really have to get in shape because I don't believe I  
have ever met a man who has not been turned by tail &  
there are more than one of you, kind of typical of fathers  
in my experience

Certainly, there are exceptions, and my dear readers will  
recall them with speed  
There are no exceptions in these poems.

A father is a patriarchal term indicating a certain level of  
control, power, &  
reprieve from accountability.

When referring to the beginning of the United States of America as a founding by the fathers, are we supposing these fathers to be the givers and deliverers of this land, Turtle Island?

Lest we forget the beginning, centuries before the fathers escaped by sea to this settle themselves at the top of the new world, this old world existed &

there lived and thrived many groups of peoples that came to be known as “merciless savage Indians,”

& although I wear the t-shirt with this part of the declaration in gangsta script, it is not without irony & because I am fatherless & a mixed-blood savagely sexual being, I started thinking and writing about being lovers with the founding fathers and all the following fathering presidents of

A homeland stolen under the flag—a fabric symbol but a thing nonetheless that does not manifest its own destiny, yet holds a story

A *thing*, such as a woman. (Pichon-Barron, 2022, p.74)

***Taking Territory in the Name of Manifest Destiny***

The mechanism of changing the name of something doesn't change the essence of that thing; however, it changes perception, reaction, and exerted power. The long-term plan of the founders was to move settlers westward, although the original presumption was that they'd only need east of the Mississippi River for expansion; however, with the settler population exploding and the conflicts between the Natives and the settlers due to settler encroachment on Native lands, the real crux of defining the western frontier lands as territory provided the U.S. control and power over the land (i.e. territory). The first removal that was implemented with the promise "to extinguish American Indian land title" was in 1802 with the Georgia Compact. Next, The Louisiana Purchase, which comprised a swath of land in the middle of Turtle Island west of the Mississippi River was purchased from the French in 1803 for 15 million dollars. The problem was that the French only controlled a tiny part of the over 500 million acres and Native Americans lived, as they had since time immemorial, on the land and were "controlled" by themselves, essentially left alone to live as they had been. See the map below, which is a modern map of the United States overlapping with territory bought in the Louisiana Purchase (in white) to understand the scope of space and place:

*Figure 7 Louisiana Purchase Vente de la Louisiane*



*Note.* The Louisiana Purchase Projection: USA Contiguous Albers Equal Area Conic

(EPSG:102003) Sources: Natural Earth and Portland State University

(<https://gist.github.com/wboykinm/05756ac2e625bae9ed81>)

This near doubling of the territory that the newly organized and empowered United States put thousands of Indigenous people at risk—for their lives, their homes, their culture, their food sources—their homelands sold by one colonizer that didn't settle to a more powerful, settling colonizer with a penchant for taking what they wanted, entitled by their belief in Manifest Destiny, as their god-given right (and purpose) to steal and murder. Typically, and historically, academic scholars use words like expand and conflict when describing Manifest Destiny, with the occasional nod to genocide in a

peripheral kind of way. In the information rich book, *How to Hide an Empire*, the author writes:

To realize their vision, the founders created a distinct political category for the frontier: territory...What was this non-state territory? The Constitution was notably close-lipped, discussing the matter only in a single sentence. It granted Congress the power ‘to dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States’ (Immerwahr, 2019, p. 29).

Although the concept of Manifest Destiny has been around as long as humans have been in conflict with one another for power and resources, Manifest Destiny in its specificity as a term is credited to a journalist named John O’Sullivan. In the July-August 1845 issue of the *Democratic Review*, O’Sullivan wrote an editorial, “Annexation,” where he advocated for the annexation of Texas because it was “the fulfillment of our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions.” Again, two years later, O’Sullivan wrote another editorial stating “...the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent, which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us” (Baldwin, n.d.). The deeply insidious and extremely effective demonstration of how identity politics can destroy is found when examining the period of Manifest Destiny beginning with the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the subsequent Lewis & Clark expedition west to report on new territories for settlement, through the War of 1812 between Britain and America, and gaining fervor and backing from the populace during the Mexican-American War in

1946 – 1948 and into the Oregon Territory expansion with the Oregon Treaty of 1846, establishing the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel (U.S. and Canadian border).

**Figure 8**

*U.S. At Beginning of Mexican War 1846*

*Note.*

The map below shows the timeline and sequence of “territorial gains,” or Manifest Destiny as the original thirteen colonies fought for their independence from Great Britain then, in relatively swift measure, stole the independence of the Indigenous Americans.

**Figure 9**

*Territorial Gains by the U.S.*



All through the 1800s, Indigenous people were killed and displaced by the use of Manifest Destiny to rationalize and justify American imperialism. As recently as 125 years ago, U.S. President McKinley called upon Manifest Destiny to annex Hawaii (1898) after war broke out in the Philippines.

I feel it pertinent to note that when examining identity politics through the lens of Manifest Destiny, I am not inferring that every White person, every settler, every person with a belief that their god and way of life was superior to others (Indigenous Americans) intended or wanted to cause harm; however, the ideology of Manifest Destiny feeding the fire for a better life, safer life, more riches, less hardship under the belief that it was their divine right to behold, nonetheless caused great harm to

Indigenous Peoples. The very essence of Manifest Destiny called out White Christians as superior to the Indians-- who lived on the divined territory, thus could be removed because they were not White Christians.

Identity politics is like clay and can be molded by the user to suit the intended purpose. Just as the Indigenous Peoples were categorized and identified as one group, all types of Whites, from bandits, squatters, "white savages," families looking for a new home/life, and explorers moving into the western frontier were lumped together as pioneers. Immerar (2019) states:

A country that had started out resembling the British Empire, with centers of power in the East and subordinated territory in the West, had been turned by the population bomb into something different: a violently expansive empire of settlers, feeding on the land and displacing everything in its path. (p. 37)

As America grew, by sheer force of the number of settlers, the government responded with theft through purchasing (the Louisiana Purchase, The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, The Gadsen Purchase, Oregon Territory) until the entire land from east to west and north to south was under one nation's control. Theft through purchasing is an accurate term for the action of acquiring the entirety of what we call America, for the land's original "owners" are the Indigenous Peoples who were colonized by the Europeans at various points in the past 600 hundred years; therefore, colonizer to colonizer, it wasn't their land to sell. Tuck and Yang (2012) write:

Not unique, the United States, as a settler colonial nation-state, also operates as an empire - utilizing external forms and internal forms of colonization simultaneous to the settler colonial project. This means, and this is perplexing to

some, that dispossessed people are brought onto seized Indigenous land through other colonial projects. (p. 7)

Identity politics can be viewed through the lens of settler colonial projects, when we consider the intersections of identity politics between groups of marginalized people of color. The empire building of the U.S. distracts from the conversation of settler colonialism through identity politics because the categorizing and identifying who belongs to these identity groups seems to leave out the sovereignty of Indian tribes and tribal peoples. Tuck and Yang (2012) identify two forms of settler colonialism that I concur are both present, in the current definition below, in how Indigenous Americans are continually exposed to genocidal, albeit slow genocidal, practices through both internal (tribal) and external (federal government) forces that are shaping the future.

*External colonialism* (also called exogenous or exploitation colonization) denotes the expropriation of fragments of Indigenous worlds, animals, plants and human beings, extracting them in order to transport them to - and build the wealth, the privilege, or feed the appetites of - the colonizers, who get marked as the first world. And..." *internal colonialism*, the biopolitical and geopolitical management of people, land, flora and fauna within the "domestic" borders of the imperial nation.

*Settler colonialism* operates through internal/external colonial modes simultaneously because there is no spatial separation between metropole and colony. For example, in the United States, many Indigenous peoples have been forcibly removed from their homelands onto reservations, indentured, and abducted into state custody, signaling the form of colonization as simultaneously internal (via boarding schools and other biopolitical modes of control) and

external (via uranium mining on Indigenous land in the US Southwest and oil extraction on Indigenous land in Alaska).... (pp. 4,7)

In order to practice either external or internal colonialism, the Indigenous Peoples of any colonized space must be identified as outside (Indian, aboriginal, etc.) of the settler identity paradigm. The naming of all Indigenous people on Turtle Island as Indian was a brilliant move in the playbook of empire building and using identity politics to gain support in ridding the “new” country of its “Indian problem.” As Ned Blackhawk (2022) asserts: “Despite assertions to the contrary, American democracy arose from the dispossession of American Indians” (p. 1). American Indians, once identified as these other people, were easily marked as an obstacle for American settlers to live their full and entitled lives.

Considering that the many bands, clans, pueblos, and other groupings of Indigenous Americans were identified as tribes and tribal people, implying that they, as a whole group, were savage and separate from the settlers, it is necessary to understand how a word can be placed upon an entire population of diverse peoples for the purpose of imposing settler-colonial laws, policies, and ideologies on them.

“Etymologically, ‘tribe’ is fairly neutral, from the Latin *tribus*, an administrative category designating a voting unit: that is, a body of people endowed with a degree of political power. It does not presuppose an opposition...” (Mishan, 2020). In the West, the concept of tribe was often (and perhaps still is, albeit unspoken) a term used for a group of people that were less civilized than the civilized dominant white people, or it implied that the group of people, the tribe, were savage. Tribes were used as a type of identity

politics, and a way for the U.S., among other colonizers, to separate and oppress the Indigenous people of the land being colonized.

Under U.S. law, "tribe" is a bureaucratic term. For a community of Native Americans to gain access to programs, and to enforce rights due to them under treaties and laws, they must be recognized as a tribe...Historically, the U.S. government treats all Native American groups as tribes because of the same outdated cultural evolutionary theories and colonial viewpoints that led European colonialists to treat all African groups as tribes. (Lowe, 2001)

The working definition of "tribe" per *Merriam-Webster* is "a social group composed chiefly of numerous families, clans, or generations having a shared ancestry and language." Ironically, or not, the word chiefly jumped out at me when writing this. Words like tribe do not cause harm except when used to indicate a *less than* situation. The use of the word tribe and tribes is prevalent among Native Americans because not only does it signify a legal standing, but it is also deeply woven into the lexicon of Native Americans and non-Natives.

Ned Blackhawk (2022) stated:

Encounter—rather than discovery—must structure America's origins story. For over five hundred years peoples have come from outside of North America to the homelands of Native peoples, whose subsequent transformations and survival provide one potential guide through the story of America. Native peoples collectively spoke hundreds of languages and lived in societies ranging from small family bands to large-scale empires with emperors and vassal subjects.

(p. 3)

Pre-encounter and pre-settler invasion, the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island lived together based typically in geographical regional groupings with their own languages, social structures, sustenance, and cultural practices. Indigenous People identified a myriad of ways—by their roles in their communities, by the resources surrounding them, by the season they were born into, by what they were “good” at, by their birth order or age. Identity was often given by merit, or an observable patterned behavior. We know this not due to European documented evidence but because of tribal origin stories, traditional songs, oral storytelling, and ceremony.

### ***“Identity Paradox”***

Identity for Native Americans is often only viewed through the lens of culture and not tribal citizenship. These two are conflated and used interchangeably, while the social/cultural and political identity of Native Americans is very different, as examined more thoroughly within the next chapter, “Blood & Belonging.” People who are federally recognized tribal citizens have a political and legal standing; descendants and non-enrolled or non-federally recognized tribal peoples have no political or legal rights or responsibilities (in the legal, not cultural way). Looking toward the contemporary or modern Indian, Grande (2015) pursues this line of reasoning:

The project of defining a contemporary Indian identity is, thus, highly mediated by whitestream forces, particularly the homogenizing effects of global capitalism.

This reality exposes the perceived existential crisis of identity as in actuality a crisis of power, specifically, the power to name, shape, and control the products

and conditions of one's life and particularly one's labor. As a result, the 'crisis' of American Indian identity is perhaps better articulated as an identity paradox.

(p. 141)

This identity paradox that Grande provides has been debated and analyzed in many circles, scholarly and socially, because it is the tipping point we are at, the crossroads where decisions must be made, and plans enacted to pursue a balance between traditional ways of being and knowing and the future of Indigenous peoples. We cannot have it both ways or live in a contradictory status quo and still pursue authentic well-being.

While it is true that settler colonialism situated white supremacy and capitalism as the governing power systems, we all live with, this is the homeland, and we are here. What gain for us or the next seven generations if, as a collective, we ignore the tethering of the modern-day world? Native Americans cannot disrupt or change the colonial machinations by prescribing to the genocidal practices of deciding who is and who is not a real Indian through the framework of federally recognized tribes without full exposure and cognizance of how we arrived at this place. Grande (2015) posits that the whitestream dominant American culture and people have never understood what it means to be "Indian and even less about what it means to be tribal" (p. 140).

The bigger question is, who gets to decide the identity of the original peoples of Turtle Island? Understanding the forces that work against each other and how they were formed with the purpose of eliminating all Indigenous peoples by death or assimilation (another kind of death).

Grande (2015) asserts that discourse around American Indian identity must begin with examining the legal and political forces that historically shaped the formation of American Indian identity, then articulating a contemporary framing of the differences in American Indian identity that exist *because of* the historical legal and political forces, followed by assessing the dominant modes of identity theory in terms of the intersection with the contemporary American Indian identity articulation. What Grande is laying out specifically is that the dominant modes of educational theory fail to:

Effectively interrogate and disrupt the project of colonization....but have also provided theoretical basis and intellectual space for its continuance. More specifically, the colonialist forces of corporate commodification, identity appropriation, and cultural imperialism are discussed as the consequences of a geographic and political terrain that aims to absorb Indigenous peoples. (p. 141)

The very image of “absorb Indigenous peoples” is powerful in its wretchedness and truth. This entire project of America, of any settler-colonial project anywhere, is to absorb. All the isms—colonialism, capitalism, racism, imperialism—absorb us, because Indigenous people must be erased for settler-colonialism to be complete.

A settler-colonial relationship, as defined by Coulthard (2014), is:

Characterized by a particular form of domination; that is, it is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority. (p.

7) Settler-colonialism's primary priority is to control territorial resources; it is about extraction; it is the benchmark of global domination; and at its core, settler-colonialism is anti-humanity, from an Indigenous worldview.

For a socio-political hierarchy to be established, the colonizers must identify the original inhabitants of the land as *other*; as not only different from themselves, but less than. Captain R. H. Pratt, founder of the Carlisle Indian School Project (one of the first Indian residential schools, 1879) articulated the insidious desires of assimilation intersecting with othering during his 1892 speech titled "The Advantage of Mixing the Indian with the Whites" at the National Conference of Charities and Correction with his infamous idea of *kill the Indian, save the man*. The concept of separating the *others* (Indigenous Americans) from the mainstream society (Christian, White) is identity politics is doing double-duty. Working against Native Americans and for White settlers. Joy Harjo (2020) writes that:

Our existence as sentient human beings in the establishment of this country was denied. Our presence is still an afterthought, and fraught with tension, because our continued presence means that the mythic storyline of the founding of this country is inaccurate. (p. 1)

This idea that the very existence of Native Americans incited years of genocide perpetuated by the American government is almost too much to comprehend because the scope and depth of atrocities committed against Natives is unfathomable.

I am often reminded during this research project how vital time and place is for context and ethical analysis of historical events and stories. I am thinking about the many people who hid their Indianness, who assimilated into western culture, and the

survival stories that are held within. I want to argue that this is a subverted form of *othering*; that Native Americans were resilient, futurists who, by dividing and *othering* themselves to distract or disappear into the folds of American life, became the ultimate survivalists. Every time I type the word *othering*, it autocorrects to “mothering”—nothing I do changes it, so I am choosing to receive this as a sign from ancestors that when we, as women particularly, are othered, we revert to a type of mothering as our method of survival; we take care; we protect; we collaborate; and we fight in whatever means necessary—with our body, mind, heart, and spirit.

Leigh Patel (2015) writes:

While all narratives can be understood as fictional, they must also be understood as inherently political and therefore laden with the potential to be beneficent or malignant. The narratives of a nation are not malignant because they are narratives. Rather, their malignancy resides in their impenetrability and material impact. The imaginary of settler nations being built by immigrants is a malignant fiction deeply needed to sustain systemic structures. First – and perpetually – the settler imaginary needs a story that can obscure its violently consumptive structure (of relegating land and bodies into property for the extraction of resources and labor). Settler colonialism has an insatiable thirst for land as a form of property to be held by a few. These violent material practices always involve harm, pain, suffering, and death – nothing less. This violence is made continually possible through narratives that contort, erase, remix, and re-present these violent realities.

Hegemony is “leadership or dominance, especially by one country or social group over others” (Oxford Languages). Hegemony, in the case of settler-colonialism, is better defined as a group of people dominating another group of people, for their own gain. America is a cultural hegemony, as Marxist scholar, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) developed the theory of cultural hegemony to further establish the working-class worldview. It also stands to appropriately describe one of the ways in which authority is exercised over Indigenous Peoples. “Cultural hegemony is the domination of a culturally diverse society by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society. The imposed ruling class worldview then becomes the accepted cultural norm, the universally valid dominant ideology that justifies and protects the status quo” (“cultural hegemony”). Would it be too simplified if these concepts, theories, philosophies we dissect and evaluate to make sense of the world and humanity were distilled into one desire and goal: power?

### **Constructs of Indigenous Authenticity & Concentrated Review of Literature**

Sandy Grande (2004) in *Red Pedagogy*, discusses the notion of authenticity as it relates “essentialist” theories, that is, “theories of identity that treat race (and other aspects of identity) as a stable and homogenous construct...” (p. 92). Grande’s main argument, and I agree, is that “by displacing the real sites of struggle (sovereignty and self-determination), the discourse of identity politics ultimately obfuscates the real sources of oppression--colonialism and global capitalism” (2004, p. 92). Her research in the realm of identity politics for Indigenous peoples takes firm hold within academia, focusing on the theorists, academics, and researchers.

My issue is what about the voices of the actual people who are involved in this identity-crisis? There are interviews and surveys, but I want more, more stories from real people with lived experience and intergenerational memory. Grande's bigger message is that by understanding the historical and colonial practices that created the "identity paradox" (2004, p. 95) for Native Americans, these continue to lead us into the future without disrupting the "whitestream theories of identity" (2004, p. 95) that not only adhere to, but promote colonization. Exploring the concept of "ethnic switching," Grande says researchers attribute it to the increasing numbers of people who identify as Native American on the U.S. census and how these phenomena could be related to the economic and social capital associated with being Native American in today's world. This begs the question, how does cultural appropriation or identity appropriation play into the identity and belonging in Indigenous communities?

Traditionally, if kinship and acceptance by the group (tribe) were the primary measures of who belonged, then where does that place a person who newly discovers their heritage or was born and grew up away from their homelands? Traditionally, one did not even have to possess a drop of Indian blood to be welcomed and accepted as part of a community if they were deemed valuable to the group—we see this in archival photos, documentation, tribal and family stories. We see this in the last names that populate throughout the tribes and know that there were marriages between Scottish, Irish, Hawaiian, French and they lived among the tribes. That is not to state that in today's world non-Indigenous people would be enrolled, card-carrying Indians, but to illustrate a different time and place, a different worldview of identity and belonging.

I offer the following as a conundrum I, and many in the same situation, encounter when dealing with Indigenous identity and identity politics.

The U.S. federal government passed the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (1935) that essentially states that only “certified Indian” arts and crafts can be sold under the auspices of being authentically created by a real Indian. For example: as an unrecognized and un-enrolled Native American, I cannot state that my beading or artwork is made by me, at least not the Indian blood part of me. I can use the term Indigenous because I am also Indigenous Mexican. I would never state that I am an enrolled tribal citizen because I am not, and I understand the reason for the Indian Arts and Crafts Act, just as I know what cultural appropriation is. My concern was raised when a social media page that I belong to, called Indigenous Writers, posed the question of should Literature also have a law passed that only real Indians can write about anything to do with Indians. Once again, this would only include those who are federally recognized, regardless of kinship, belonging, community acceptance; basically, furthering the concept that Indigenous identity must be given legally and formally; it cannot be earned, discovered, and ultimately, in the case of the Native American, the settler-colonizer mindset infiltrates sovereign practices.

“Regimes of biological and cultural authenticity continue to shape state policies and practices that regulate the everyday lives of Indigenous people around the world” (Harris et al., 2013, p. 1). I concur with this statement, yet there are Indigenous scholars that propose there is a distinct difference conceptually between “social identity” and “personal identity,” as related to “biological and cultural authenticity,” and I disagree on the basis that both social and personal identities are contextual, deeply grounded in

time and place, as well as fluidly moving through time and place. To separate into two categories belies the reality that they, even conceptually, intersect and collide at various points, contingent on the time and place. These points of fluidity and change are presented and agreed upon within the work but are framed in this way:

one of the conceptual cornerstones of this volume—human actors deliberately and intentionally act out their identities in ever-changing ways as a consequence of the social relations and settings in which they find themselves. Identity, we contend, is a product of both agency and structure. (Harris et al., 2013, p. 4)

By evaluating identities as discursive resources, people are often caught within the binary of Indigenous or not. This process further alienates the non-Western elements, the Indigenous cosmology as it were, from the accessibility of mainstream scholars and opponents of Indigenous rights (a major right being self-determination around identity) by use of rhetoric. The pertinent issue is diluted and potentially lost within the digression.

Individuals laying claim to particular identities may find that others challenge those claims. The evaluation of others may be accepted or rejected by the individual, but it is in this context that claims and counter-claims about indigenous identities emerge. In this sense, the negotiation and renegotiation of indigenous identities involves claiming and resisting identities from within a set of prevailing discourses about the authenticity of particular indigenous categories. The social actors that articulate these discourse themselves, of course, embedded in unequal sets of social, economic, and political relations. As a result, these narratives about who should count as indigenous have conflicting political

implications for different groups of indigenous people in the present especially given the increasingly diverse circumstances in which indigenous people now find themselves. (Harris et al, 2013, pp. 5-6)

We cannot go back in time and rid the identity process of colonial underpinnings. To acknowledge that the politics behind determining Indigenous authenticity belongs to the colonial, white-supremacy mindset and is rooted, firmly, in the ideology of capitalism and globalism is to plan for the future survival of Indigeneity. On the journey toward future survivance, how do we create through sovereignty and self-determination, individually and collectively, what Grande (2004) calls “comfortable modern identities”? Only by recognizing the value of Indigenous identity as a method of survival, as well as a method of resistance to ongoing colonization and encroachment on tradition and culture, we are practicing sovereignty.

At this juncture, we can correlate the concept of rhetoric to talk about the exploitative relationship between the US government and federally recognized tribes and non-recognized tribal people; We can also dissect what it means to be a domestic dependent nation and what sort of emancipation can take place; for example, the land back movement. This inquiry also speaks to democracy and, as Grande (2004) brings forth:

A logical place to begin this journey of understanding is at the point of ‘encounter’ examining the various dimensions of conflict and contradiction between the sovereign peoples of the Americas and the colonizers, asking the question: can democracy be built upon the bloody soils of genocide? (p. 29).

For the record, today anyway, I will state that no, democracy cannot be fully realized in true form as intended (via the definition of democracy, not the instigators of the installation of democracy) when the first step to realizing it is genocide.

What does democracy mean within tribes and identity? Jessica Bardill (Cherokee) restates what we already know of Indigenous communities in the context of belonging and identity:

Traditionally, tribal membership was determined through systems of kinship, clan, and even adoption. Whether the result of warfare, orphaning, marriage, or other social transaction, adoption allowed individuals to find belonging in a tribe or clan, many times not the one into which they were born. (n.d.)

In modern times, if we consider the United Nations (UN) Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 33, which states: “1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions...” One could reasonably presume to identify themselves as a member within their own rights of self-determination, within “their customs and traditions,” and this does not state *who* determines the customs and traditions. One could reasonably argue, under the U.S. federal legality, that the *who* are those given the authority within each federally recognized tribes, as sovereign nations. The UN declaration is also presuming, or ignoring perhaps, the fact that each Indigenous group of people is over-governed by the (settler) colonial powers. For example, if an Indigenous person in the U.S. wanted to self-determine and identify as Indigenous, politically and legally such identity would have no weight or power if the 1) tribe or nation under which said Indigenous person identifies with is not federally recognized, and 2) if the tribe or nation are federally

recognized, the individual would have to meet the specific tribe/nation's enrollment criteria to be enrolled. As lovely as the declaration sounds or looks on paper, it is negligent in accounting for the ongoing colonial project of assimilation and eradication that is ever-present in the lives of Indigenous people. This is evidenced within the U.S. as:

While tribal sovereignty enables tribes to determine their own membership, in most cases and particularly for tribes applying for recognition, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) maintains a role of review for those requirements through the CFR" placing "particular limits and expectations upon newly recognized and many reorganized tribes. (Bardill, n.d.)

For comparison, looking at the determining criteria for the Indigenous Māori of New Zealand to be recognized as Māori, as well as have equality as citizens of New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi sets the framework and foundation for Māori sovereignty and self-determination. The New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings defines and counts Māori "in two ways in the census: through ethnicity and through Māori descent. Māori ethnicity and Māori descent are different concepts-- ethnicity refers to cultural affiliation, while descent is about ancestry. Ethnicity is the ethnic group or groups that a person identifies with or feels they belong to" (Gleisner et al., 2015). I am most curious about the way in which "ethnicity" is defined and used, compared to the North American usage, defined as a noun, "1. an ethnic group; a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or the like 2. ethnic traits, background, allegiance, or association" ("ethnicity"). This working definition, as applied to Indigenous peoples, other than "background" (ambiguous at

best), does not overtly state descendancy, and Duane Champagne (2015) believes “ethnicity and indigeneity are two different forms of cultural identity” (par. 1).

Champagne further asserts that:

Based on personal circumstances and an encouraging policy environment from modernizing nation states, many people of indigenous descent choose to abandon indigenous tribal identities. Some take up identities as detribalized indigenous people, or metis as in Canada, mestizos as in Latin American and South America, or as ethnic Indians in the United States. (par. 3)

Champagne’s claims, I argue, are not rooted in historical context, nor give appropriate due diligence to the mechanisms of settler-colonialism and oppression that forced, not “choose to abandon,” many Indigenous people to leave their homeland, their Indigenous ways of life, and to put aside cultural practices in order to survive. I also argue that Champagne’s notion of “take up identities” further enforced the view that “mixed-race” people have forged an identity outside their Indigenous roots when the terms “metis” and “mestizo” were attached to mixed-race people by the colonizers and oppressors. Also, mestizo is most commonly a term found in Mexico, Latin America, and the Philippines; and Mexican Mestizos is an accepted term to describe Indigenous people from Mexico that have mixed Indigenous (Amerindian) and European heritage. I have the word “mestiza” tattooed on my inner forearm, in the pages of an open book; a metaphor of being “an open book” whilst having to spell out what I am. It is also representative of not telling the whole story, unless I choose to; there is only the one word on the page.

Scholar Kevin Bruyneel (2021) calls the “work of settler memory...a process of remembering and disavowing Indigenous political agency, colonialist dispossession, and violence toward Indigenous peoples.” When discussing the dispossession of land, Bruyneel calls out two U.S. federal policies that were tantamount to the loss of Indian territory—the Homestead Act of 1862 and the General Allotment Act of 1887 (also known as the Dawes Act, named after the proposer, Senator Henry Dawes). During these periods, Indian lands were sold to railroad companies and settlers, as well as divided into tribal reservations that allotted individual land parcels to only Indian males who were head of household, selling the rest of the lands to primarily white settlers (p. 51). Another example of identity politics, because if only the male Indian could acquire these allotments, so are we to presume that no female Indian head of her family, widowed, or unmarried could have land? In a culture heavily marked by matrilineal societies?

I am apt to agree with Bruyneel’s assessment that there is a distinct, calculated dynamic between “the three pillars of settler colonialism focusing on territory, people, and identity” (2021, p.115). Indigenous axiology begins with Relationality, the weave of which holds all the three pillars put forth—territory (land, waterways, air), people (community), and identity (the characteristics that create culture). As these are interconnected, taking away, destroying, assimilating, or imprisoning one aspect, impacts all. “Indians are like the weather. Everyone knows all about the weather, but none can change it,” says Vine Deloria Jr. in his Indian Manifesto, *Custer Died for Your Sins* (1969, p. 1) and this sentiment speaks volumes to the centuries of Indians fighting to just be Indian.

John Collier, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in 1934, “realized that Indians were already Indians.” And so to him, “It was a simple matter, therefore, for Collier to advocate the creation of legal status whereby tribes could become competitive in modern society and undertake development programs which would be a result of community desires” (Deloria, 1969, p.144). The result was stated in the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 that each tribe had the right to have a constitution and charter under law. On the surface, this seemed a step in the right direction of tribal sovereignty. At its core, the burden of success and survival of the tribes was put solely onto the tribes themselves, or from another perspective, it provided a loophole for the federal government, a plenary power over tribes, to be responsible for failures to uphold treaty rights. The construction of western-modeled government structures was an ideological departure from how most tribes organized. Dr. Debra Harry (Kooyooe Dukaddo from Pyramid Lake, Nevada) in a conversation with Leonie Pihama (Te Ātiawa, Ngāti Māhanga, Ngā Māhanga ā Tairi) who is a leading Māori scholar, educator, and researcher (2017), says that:

So much of these identity politics are shaped by federal policy, and how the federal government wants us to define ourselves. Those early racist and arbitrary policies instituted in the late 1800s and early 1900s are still being carried out today, and studiously integrated into tribal membership policies that we now implement for and against ourselves. These determinations of who is or is not a member or citizen are based on these false constructs. (p.102)

And Harry continues by referring to the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 as the platform for blood quantum to continue as a method of tribal identification and authenticity:

...for most tribes, this act replaced traditional forms of governance with elected tribal governments through a boilerplate constitution and bylaws. An aspect of this act includes criteria for determining tribal membership based on notions of blood quantum. It's clearly developed as an assimilationist strategy designed to diminish the number of individuals who can claim citizenship with a particular tribe.... it assumes an individual, beginning at an arbitrary point in time, is 100% of a particular tribe. (p. 99)

I agree with Harry that this strategy was pre-meditated to tighten the control and measures of who was Indian for the purpose of decreasing the population of legal, political Indians who could exercise sovereignty and power. Leonie Pihama (2017), earlier in the conversation with Harry, says that as a way of introduction:

it is important to note that prior to the invasion of our lands we always identified ourselves by our *whanau* (extended family of at least three generations), *hapu* (subtribal group) and *iwi* (tribal groupings). The term *Māori* actually means “pure” or “normal”. So our *tupuna* (ancestors) chose to use a term that highlighted the centrality of our positioning in these lands and which identified us collectively as being her. We did not see ourselves as “other” to anyone, in the way that the colonizers viewed us, we saw ourselves as the norm. (p. 90)

I love this and want to say that there is something similar with Indigenous Americans; however, we are in an exhausted and demoralized time currently where there is more

division than collaboration, more separatism than collectivism. *Māori* as a collective term for all of the tribes and sub-tribes and tribal groupings, and as a signifier uniting all of the Indigenous People of Aotearoa (New Zealand) when the colonizers invaded, reminds me of the many words that different tribes across Turtle Island called themselves that translated loosely to mean *the people*.

Beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the influx of settlers and the colonies' land grabs, the Indigenous political structure formed from traditions, did not line up with the settler's understanding and practice of power to have a supreme leader, a man, surrounded by other, let's call them advisors, also men, who essentially made the rules, policies, and laws that everyone followed. Thus, the "Chief", which is derived from the French term chef, from the Latin word caput—"the head of a group." The colonists anglicized the term, and we are still today, some 400 years later, familiar (perhaps too familiar) with Chiefs. Consider how identifying a chief was an early act of identity politics, as "most tribes had never defined power in authoritarian terms" (Deloria, 1969, p. 205).

Coulthard (2014), when examining the politics of recognition through the works of Fanon and Hegel, is important to note that a landmark in Hegel's philosophy is that humans are social beings and cannot achieve self-recognition without the recognition of another. In other words, for Hegel (who coined the term "struggle for recognition"): "recognition is the mechanism by which our existence as social beings is generated. Therefore, our successful integration as ethical and political subjects within a particular community is dependent upon receiving (and conferring) appropriate forms of recognition" (McQueen). In true form, great philosophers contrived Indigenous ways and

philosophies of life and the elements of life (i.e., recognition) through a muddling of Euro-centric knowledge and thought, and without recognition of the timeless beliefs and practices of the Indigenous peoples. Coulthard examines the notion that “recognition inevitably leads to subjection”, positioning the view that “Indigenous subjects are always being interpellated by recognition, being constructed by colonial discourse, or being assimilated by colonial power structures. As a result, resistance to this totalizing power is often portrayed as an inherently reactionary, zero-sum project” (2014, p.42). Pre-colonization these philosophies and undertakings of freedom, per se, of colonized peoples around the world would have been absurd and unnecessary. Is that because the Indigenous Peoples pre-colonization recognized one another without subjugation, or resources were aplenty, thus diverting conflicts, or there was simply no reason to evaluate the terms of recognition because there was no imposition of colonization?

According to Coulthard (2014), Fanon’s view of self-determination and recognition politics was mired in, “the colonized must initiate the process of decolonization by first recognizing themselves as free, dignified, and distinct contributors to humanity” (p. 43). The colonial condition is the foundation from which identity politics for Indigenous Peoples was formed. The “politics of recognition” as characterized by Coulthard (2014) is:

A recognition-based approach to reconciling Indigenous peoples’ assertions of nationhood with settler-state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity-related claims through the negotiation of settlements over issues such as land, economic development, and self-government. (p.151)

As he posits that settler-colonialism “a structure of domination predicated on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ lands and political authority...” (p.151), we can only surmise that any form of Indigenous reconciliation or recognition by Indigenous Peoples will be constructed within the systems of settler-colonialism; therefore, I pose the counterargument that building new transformative, not restorative, systems, by and for Indigenous People, is the pathway to realizing an Indigenist future.

The concept of power cannot be ignored. Settler-colonialism and all colonialist projects are grounded in acquiring power. Joely De La Torre (2004) examines an Interpretive approach to understanding power by comparing “Power and politics analyzed under an interpretive approach become expressions of meanings and an understanding of experiences and shared values: political reality is created or constituted symbolically”...and as opposed to positivist approach, that is the most common way of understanding political power—through a lens of economy and who gets what, when, “interpretivism examines intention and purpose through meanings, language, and symbols” (p. 180). This idea is simplified in that historically the mode of assessing and understanding power has been informed by subjective and value-opposing processes—

Government policies imposed on American Indians have been informed by positivist influences...the United States has presented American Indian federal policy as being in the best interest of American Indians, non-Indian Americans, and the United States as a whole (p. 180).

The narrative is written by the winners, or so the common phrase goes, leaving out the presumed—and not by the losers. In cases such as attempting to analyze power

through any intellectualized approach, we will fail woefully in truly attending to such historical narratives unless approached from an Indigenous worldview and paradigm.

Gabriel Horn (2003) in his essay "The Genocide of a Generation's Identity," writes about his two uncles introducing him to his "Native Heart" and teaching him that his Indian identity "did not come in parts and percents of blood or from a tribal enrollment number and government legislation" (p. 66). He writes beautifully asking: "...how many times this heart can be broken?" (p. 73). Toward the end of his work, he asks and answers what an Indian is; and exposes his fear for the future:

and what can be even more threatening to our future is that too often, greedy tribal governments, not wanting to open tribal roles to share tribal responsibility, do not recognize many of these children who are often born in urban hospitals, as Indians. neither does the federal government, leading me to think that our own people have joined that government and now take part in this kind of paper genocide. ...Simply having Indian blood computed on a tribal ID card does not define an Indian. Of this I can be certain. (p. 74)

Identity on its own merits, values, and interpretations somehow becomes everyone's business, as if anyone is entitled to an opinion, a judgment; therefore, how can we digest the cause and effects of identity politics on Indigenous and tribal peoples when the effects are not tangible or immediate? It is arguable that identity politics does not need to manifest in further or ongoing oppressive acts toward the identified group of people, yet as the research explores and examines, the impacts tend toward reinforcing settler-colonial racism, separatism, eradication, white supremacy, androcracy, and a lack of community determination. Furthermore, the identity of marginalized,

dispossessed, and oppressed groups can be corrupted by the historical narrative of a dominant power structure. Today, a conversation regarding the use of “member” as opposed to “citizen” as people introduce themselves by their tribal affiliations is common, and you will hear both ways of introduction. Some folks also use the terms direct descendant of and descendant of when introducing all the places they belong or situating themselves as Native but not enrolled. I have been told by more than a few Natives (not from the Pacific Northwest and not working in academia) that “nobody introduces themselves like this back home,” and “I’ve never heard this way before-- listing all their family and tribes and names and whatnot; I don’t know what that’s all about.” I consider this another form of identity politics. A positive effect is that there is the potential to build community by situating your tribal affiliation and family from the upstart, and a negative in that there can be an immediate alienation and othering that happens for non-enrolled tribal members.

This form of identity politics has the potential to be an internally (Indigenous/tribal) divisive mechanism and way to attach and fuel misrepresentations. Tribes, and families, have reputations that precede them, reputations that may or may not be truthful but exist nonetheless. What other group of people announce themselves by listing all their family members (that are applicable to only a specific identity) and origins by geographical location--can you imagine how long and tedious and unpowerful that would become? I say unpowerful because the more you name and frame and name and blame and name and...it becomes the same...there is less and less power in the identity. Identity, depending on point of view, measures power, or lack thereof. It is also determined by context, social, economic, political, and any combination of them.

Because the settler state remains in full force, it has the ability to retract whatever limited forms of recognition it grants and never actually has to question itself or even consider its own history very deeply. And because those seeking recognition do not build sufficient political power through coalitions, they are not in a position to successfully resist the settler state when these concessions are withdrawn. If, however, the goal becomes a different political form, perhaps under the sign of decolonization and an end to genocide and settler colonialism, it is necessary to build forms of political power to make that happen. This would require a shift away from seeking recognition from those in power, focusing instead on those interested in changing power relationships. (Simpson and Smith, 2014, p. 11)

The role of citizenship indicates political power and when American settlers were differentiating between themselves and all other groups of peoples, American citizenship was designed for white men who owned property—that was the group identified to be citizens and participate in the rights and privileges of such. In order to officially claim Indian identity, within the political realm, one must be accepted as a member or citizen of a federally recognized tribe. This is a federal recognition status given to such tribes and their peoples for the right to self-govern and have sovereign immunity among other rights under the federal law. Barker (2011) states:

But, ideologically, it is a category that works in far more obscure ways to provide for the continual rearticulation of federal authority over Native peoples. It is, in other words, most certainly not about who is and is not recognized so much as it

is about the ongoing processes of social formation that work to keep Native peoples subjugated to U.S. power. (p. 27)

Looking back at political history, it becomes simultaneously clear *and* muddled as to where the actual Native identity is within this structure. Where in this narrative and reasoning is the spirit or the heart? How can a person or group be a fraction of the whole? Are we to be grateful that at least there is some impetus at the highest level of the government to allow some agency and power to have civil, human, and legal rights as Native American (but only for those who meet the criteria, of course)? Barker (2011) discussing the Supreme Court and the Marshall Trilogy states that:

The recognition of 'Indian tribes,' then, was not about recognizing the character of tribes—as metaphysical beings or through extra-political truths there to be seen and described as Marshall claimed to be doing. Obviously, tribes were not uncivilized infidels wandering over an untouched wilderness, taking brief respites in their otherwise busy days of hunting and gathering to sign treaties for aid and protection with their newly adopted great white father. The recognition of 'Indian tribes' was instead about the United States establishing its absolute authority to recognize tribes as dependent and uncivilized and then subjugating them as such to its power. (p. 33)

If we began the conversation about identity politics and Indigenous identity from this basic premise and understanding, across Turtle Island and to our global Indigenous communities, would it make the path forward shine like a full moon on still water?

Something inside me, when I read and write this passage, goes on high alert because it feels close, or closer, to finding the roots. As I discovered during the talking circles and

interviews with the research collaborators, there are rivers between the concepts and practices of Indigenous identity--from a social/cultural perspective and the more defined political identity of federally enrolled tribal peoples.

Esther G. Belin (Diné), poet, beautifully details the horror and impact of the U.S. genocidal wave(s) crashing over Indigenous Americans in this section of her poem:

*Public Record 1831*

1. Chief Justice John Marshall created our mythic image: “domestic dependent nations.”

1. The basic principle of modern federal Indian Policy: small insertions of the “Doctrine of Discovery” serum, prescribed during each new

fiscal year. Side effects from long term use: Genocide.

1. Indian Health Service: “How long has your Indian blood been killing you?”

1. The secretary took his words. They are now Public Record:  
the Eager wait to read and write in solaced tunnels, under covers, on the side of bridge  
the Hungry are eager to swallow, fluid, solid, both at the same time

they swallow

swill down

small packages like

a lover's tongue like

a stirring pot

like a long time after

death has occurred

the record

records (2019, p. 338-339, lines 1-20)

In the history of the United States, the original notion, set forth by Thomas Jefferson, was to assimilate the Native peoples. Assimilating would encourage Natives to give up their traditions and ways of life and adopt the European, very white, and very Christian way of life. Within this *modus operandi*, if it worked in entirety, the Indigenous peoples would effectively become quasi-white, or at least fully integrated (assimilated) as “American,” leaving the identity of Choctaw or Mohawk or Lakota behind. In the Andrew Jackson era, the assimilation model (most likely because it was not working) was replaced with a separatist model, culminating in the forced removal of native peoples and the internment-style reservation system, where the indigenous people did not mix with the settlers. Neither of these practices or beliefs worked to erase the Indigenous identity; however, they both play a part in the modern conversation and controversy over who and what an authentic indigenous person or group is. Dwanna McKay (2021) said this about a research project they did, and I include it here as a unifying theme that is being explored throughout Indigenous scholarship:

Invaded on every side, first by Europeans and then by Americans, indigenous peoples resisted and survived to sustain and adapt traditional knowledges and ways of belonging. Thus, no single project can do justice to the complexity of contemporary American Indian identity. My goal is to expose the impact of centuries of oppression against American Indians as manifested in the

authenticity policing of imposed racial boundaries. In that spirit, I examine the real Indian trope by asking the following questions: What authenticity markers hold the most value for American Indians? How do American Indians justify authenticity policing?

McKay's research investigates the manifestation of settler-colonialism and how oppression impacts Indians through what he calls "authenticity policing." As there are many unique and distinct tribes, there are also many unique and distinct perspectives on what constitutes an authentic Native American. Yet, from the standpoint of tribal sovereignty, it is ultimately up to the individual tribal leadership (governments, councils) to decide what the criterion for tribal citizenship is. My question is then, does it matter what self-identifying Indigenous Americans think, feel, experience? If the only authentic Indigenous person in America is one that is enrolled in a federally recognized tribe?

It is important to acknowledge that the U.S. federal government allows for self-identification of American Indian/Alaskan Native during the population census that occurs every ten years, and the United States Census 2020 reports that:

In the 10 years since 2010, the number of people the Census categorizes as American Indian and Alaska Native increased from 5.2 million to 9.7 million. In 2020, the American Indian and Alaska Native population alone (3.7 million) accounted for 1.1 percent of all people living in the United States, compared with 0.9 percent (2.9 million) in 2010. The American Indian and Alaska Native population alone grew by 27.1 percent, and the American Indian and Alaska Native in combination population grew by 160 percent since 2010. The White and American Indian and Alaska Native population also increased, growing by about

2.5 million people or 177 percent, making it the second largest Multiracial combinations in 2020 (4 million).

Historically, there wasn't a specific category for Native Americans to be officially counted in the U.S. Census until 1860, and beginning with the 2000 survey, "American Indian" and "Alaska Native" were combined into a single identity (AI/AN) and people could identify as more than one race (*usfacts.org*). Given what criteria must be met to be considered a "real" American Indian by the government and subsequently, federally recognized tribes/nations, the census population findings for AI/AN—what is the value? I fear it is another manifestation of the colonial project. Creating a false sense of security through an increased population while, at the same time, creating fear in the mainstream population because of the increased population, which in turn causes a backlash against Native rights and the cycle continues. We saw this happen when the "Hispanic" population was increasing in the census. Sachs (2011) details the....:

Long-term effects of colonization on American Indians include a host of collective and individual malaise...some of the most pronounced of these are: loss of traditional homelands, loss of traditional sustaining practices, and disintegration of traditional communities, economics, and languages. American Indian populations have been significantly reduced, personal and communal self-sufficiency has been lost in many communities, and personal freedom and family life have been consistently disrupted. At the personal level there has been a loss of self-respect, honor, identity, and economic independence. (p 325)

The rights, protections, and services provided by the United States to individual American Indians and Alaska Natives flow not from a person's identity as such in an

ethnological sense, but because he or she is a member of a federally recognized tribe. That is, a tribe that has a government-to-government relationship and a special trust relationship with the United States. These special trust and government-to-government relationships entail certain legally enforceable obligations and responsibilities on the part of the United States to persons who are enrolled members of such tribes. Eligibility requirements for federal services will differ from program to program. Likewise, the eligibility criteria for enrollment (or membership) in a tribe will differ from tribe to tribe.

The current Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) mission is "to enhance the quality of life, to promote economic opportunity, and to carry out the responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes and Alaska Natives" (BIA). As the Native American population continues to grow, per the Census Bureau, which projects that American Indian and Alaska Natives will reach 5 million individuals by 2065, the BIA has work to prepare for.

How can human/cultural authenticity be categorized or measured when the Indigenous worldview finds its authenticity in this:

Another difference between these two ways of perceiving reality lies in the tendency of the American Indian to view space as spherical and time as cyclical, whereas the non-Indian to view space as linear and time as sequential. The circular concept requires all 'points' that make up the sphere of being to have a significant identity and function, while the linear model assumes that some 'points' are more significant than others...the Indian universe moves and breathes continuously, and the Western universe is fixed and static. (Gunn Allen, 1992, p. 59)

I am not arguing that genealogy and family/kinship relationships do not have a pivotal and key position in being, or determining, Indigenous authenticity. These relationships are salient elements of being Indigenous, practicing Indigeneity. Gunn Allen's introspection about perceiving reality between Indigenous and Western peoples provides insight into the concept of authenticity--who is and who is not Indian—is a matter of “all points that make up the sphere of being to have significant identity and function...” Dian Million (2014) states that “We are always part of someone else's theory or our own, depending on how we feel/vision it” (p. 39). This sentiment resonates in particular as I enter life after a half century lived; I live in a triptych moving between two sides that seek to theorize my being, my heart, my thoughts, and my spirit while I struggle to remain grounded as my whole self in the middle, centered. Smith (2014) sums up this feeling by reminding that “Native peoples are supposed to be singular in their infinitely knowable aspirations, and hence devoid of political complexity and contradiction, the assumptions behind their political positions require no further engagement” (p. 230). Simplifying authentic Indigenous identity denies the multiple essences that held together the larger purpose and belief in community, relationality, and reciprocity. Gomez-Quinones (2012) discusses the role of history in deciding that Indigenous Americans were other and not considered in the building of the new country, except in the matter of how to get rid of them:

Later history mimicked early history; the first minority would be the last minority.

In encounters with the original colonizers, Indians were disparaged, pilfered, dislodged, demonized, and finally killed. English-speaking ideologues from the Pilgrim clergy to Thomas Jefferson commented on Native Americans, but they

did not grant their commentary society-wide importance or consider it relevant to the task of 'nation' building. They did not even rhetorically debate whether Native Americans could be integral to the becoming of the United States. Their 'no' was without ideological discussion; from the start, their actual commitment was to building a strong state for whites—a government, not an integrated nation. Such an entity was simply not envisioned. (p. 33)

The scheme to other Indigenous Americans, is grounded in the ideology that people are not equal and inherently deserve equal rights within the governing systems, but that white males possess dominion over all others, under the guidance of their god. We experience this stratification across all elements of being. From a Western dominant mindset and worldview, from the home to the political structure, the individual to the community, people are identified then categorized to fit the dominant narrative. This doesn't just happen in America but every place colonization demands it. Amanda R. Tachine (2022) asks the complex question of: But what is at stake when our young people attempt to belong to a world that does not want them for who they are?" (p. 3) Indeed, how is anyone to belong within a culture, system, institution in where belonging means different things for different people, and the politics of belonging is not decided by those who want or need to belong? She goes on to discuss what she calls "systematic monsters" who set the "groundwork" for "White supremacy and the construction of Whiteness" (p. 7). The challenges, as Tachine sets forth, and I would add the root of the understanding and seeping of knowledge into the general public psyche, is that the "groundwork" is often overlooked because of complacency and exhaustion of people trying to survive life, and this is "how Western society functions—

we do not recognize how much of our world is formed by White supremacy” (p.7)

Another way to frame this issue is that Indigenous people are identified by the dominant powers before they can even grasp the settler-colonial long-game—eradication at best, and assimilation at least.

Racialization plays a key role in identity politics even though Native Americans are not considered a race, per se, but a political group. Again, this is only indicative of federally enrolled tribal members/citizens. To define authentic personhood, in regard to “being a real Indian,” based on settler-colonial instruments designed to steal the Indianness from the original people, should be suspect and investigated, from a historical, contemporary, and futuristic lens. In the academy, most folks are comfortable in the understanding that race is a social construct, a tool of oppression. The situation is not as simple as stating race doesn't exist because it most certainly does within political and social constructs; the legacy is perpetuated (even if not spoken aloud) by the concept of identity politics. Gomez-Quinones (2012) argues that post European racialized constructs impact Indigenous people today as they experience racism and that “yes, the definition of ‘race’ as applied to the Indigenous, continues to evolve, but its implications and repercussions remain” (73). Whatever the tool of oppression is, the objective is the same—dominance. When a group of people is dominated and lose their power and control over their lives and who they are, they have three choices: revolt, acquiesce, or become. History has witnessed all three ways of what I call survival during settler-colonial projects, and nothing has stopped the settler-colonial ideology from permeating. In defining Indigeneity from the realm of truth and an ethical paradigm, Gomez-Quinones (2012) states:

Among some Indigenous, ethnicity, group membership and cultural practices are all taken into account, encoded in a true heart whose sign is integrity. Among many Indigenous themselves, the defining truth is a historical and multifaced ethos that can be identified, described, and valued... (p. 78)

Considering how identity is built partially by forces outside the identity itself, I read an inspiring text about Indigenous girls living on the border of Mexico and the U.S. by Claudia G. Cervantes-Soon (2017). She explores the concept of identity from sociocultural and *mujerista* identity theories, which serve as her framework to describe the formation of identity as a “process of activity, involving perceptions and narratives of self that link the past to the present as well as continuous and nonlinear transformation” (p. 8). What much of the literature explores around identity politics’ impacts on Indigenous people is the dismissal and destruction of Indigenous epistemologies and the concept of change as non-linear. The changes in intellectualization, technology, global economies, and communication across borders of interpersonal, geographical, knowledge, and the rise of individualism over community/collectivism are changing the ways in which identity matters at more than a familial and community level.

### **Collaborator Interviews: Identity Politics**

The following collaborators are both women in their 60s who have lived and worked across Turtle Island. They are talented, passionate, and compelling storytellers; both published writers and academics. I met with them separately but in the same physical space on the wondrous, mysterious playa— an undrained desert basin (the water comes from the ground, not a mountain river) deep in the eastern Oregon outback

called Summer Lake. The lake's original name is Chewaucan and home to the Yahooskin Paiute and Klamath tribes.

**D.M.**, age 62, Ohlone Costanoan Esselen Nation (OCEN) and Santa Anita Chumash, born in California, grew up in Western Washington, and identifies as OCEN, queer Native woman writer.

**A.H.C.**, age 65, was born in Amarillo, Texas and “came of age” in North Carolina. She identifies as “mixed, sometimes just leaves it at that, other times adds: Cherokee, Huron, Metis, Portuguese, English, Scots, Irish, French heritage—specifically at a “doing” she’d identify properly, but not necessarily for the general public. She puts “mixed” because she is “light-skinned” and gets asked “what are you?”

This was the first-time meeting D.M. and she graciously agreed to spend some time away from her own writing (we were at a Native Women Writers residency) to respond to a few semi-structured questions about identity politics, her own experiences, and share thoughts for the future. I first met A.H.C. a couple of years ago, and it was an instant bonding of I-see-you and we have been destined to connect. Serendipitous and beautiful. We have shared many conversations around identity and belonging, traditions, family stories, academia, storytelling, and humanity in general; however, this was the first time we sat together, and I asked questions specifically for this research. Interestingly, it did not feel different than any other time we talked except that I had to be mindful of capturing her responses for the purpose of transcribing them into this section.

***How do you define identity politics, and what does it mean for Indian people?***

**D.M.:** “Idealistic and fatalistic. Identity politics are a distraction--we need to be truly Indigenous to the planet in order to survive.” She talks about how it's coming down to the wire for actual human survival and all that will matter is “do you have a relationship with our mother?” I love this jump right into what really matters; like, we are destroying our home and losing our connection of what it means to be in a healthy reciprocal relationship. She says, “We are part of our mother and the system will go on without us.” Indigenous identity politics is the “ongoing internalized form of deracination and colonization.” At this point, I had to inquire about the term deracination not only to spell it but understand the intended meaning. Deracination is to uproot or take away from a person’s natural environment—cultural, geographical, familial. We talked more about the concept of internalizing, from the lens of colonization and the trauma it caused, and that seed led into erasure and all its tentacles. She then stated that “internalized means blood quantum and tribal enrollment are imposed by the U.S. government to control and erase Indian identity and eliminate treaties.”

She continues to say “identity politics is a can of worms, it's a mess. It's a way of controlling people and at the same time a way of trying to find a way of identifying self in a white-centric world. It is a place of privilege--all through my education and academic careers, I identified as an Indigenous woman, albeit not federally enrolled—in today's world so much rides on identity. My grandchildren won't be recognized as “Indian,” my

daughter identifies as Indigenous and white, and my son identifies as the same but doesn't have "gut connection."

**A.H.C.:** "When I was a kid, it was conventional to say it (I am Indian) loud and proud. There was active engagement to identify and take back our identity because of removal and genocide. Who was full-blood was decided in and by the community, and if you were mixed, there were some things you were never privy to. It was a fight against repression but now, today, we only have a right to say who we are based on federal documentation." We talked at this point about our ancestors (both coming from North Carolina) and the documentation and records we do have being from a solely non-Native lens, the narratives being one-sided. She goes on to state: "Everyone knows that people got left off of the rolls. Being Native, it's about reciprocity, it is about what work have you done, what work are you doing and are you doing your part for your base community and for your homeland; are you being a good guest if you live within other communities and on other homelands? Traditionally, those lost--think of the Seven Generation prophecies--those lost people will return so there are possibilities for connection and reconnection and the need to restore balance and what community is."

At this point, she makes me a pumpkin-spice iced coffee, and we make plans to see each other before another year passes. True to her essence, she rallies back into the topic, not missing a beat with: "There are three options for Indigenous people, or there were three options during the removal. They were number one: stay; number two: get removed; and three: pass as non-native."

I concur and we talk more about documentation and removal. My ancestors from North Carolina are Chowanoke, Cherokee, and Choctaw and hers are Cherokee. We compare and connect family names. Both agreeing that the English kept decent records and so did the folks that were sent on explorations or settlement excursions, although from their point of view. I ask because it seemed relevant and appropriate: *how do you reconcile the social/cultural identity and the political/legal identity of being Indigenous?*

She responds: “Number one, roles were not decided by people in the tribes or tribal people even, especially in the southeast and eastern part of what is now the United States up into Canada—they were decided by the government and government agents. Number two, political identity should be based in social structure. Number three, one should be a part of and a part from. And number four--sovereignty—yes, a tribe decides the legal members and citizens of their tribe, but there are still non-legal Indians within tribal communities...so what to do with them?

***Indigenous Identity Is...?:***

**D.M.:** “My identity is wrapped into my studies and interests. I can bring my identity into my field of Creative Writing and English and Humanities.”

She taught at Pacific Lutheran University and Washington and Lee University, where she was a full professor of English in the position of the Thomas H Broadus Endowed Chair and recently retired after seventeen years. She earned her Bachelor of

Science when she was aged 21 and went back to graduate school, receiving her masters of English and her PhD, between the ages of 35 and 40, her PhD from the University of Washington in English Literature, emphasis on Native Women's Erotics and Poetry.

We talk about academia and the obstacles, challenges, and rewards. She tells me about an essay she published after a couple of years after she started teaching college, "What's Wrong with a Little Fantasy? Storytelling from the (Still) Ivory Tower" (Miranda, 2003). I look it up, of course, and feel compelled to include this:

There is something intrinsically different about being an Indian woman in the Americas, which the work of other women of color in this country cannot express: we inherit and still live histories and oppressions designed to legally enforce Indian identities as not just disempowered but genetically incapable of autonomy; we carry and still live out generations of civil rights injustices such as the denial of documented treaty rights and the deadly form of literacy, wrought in Indian Boarding Schools, meant to further enslave rather than empower...There is no metaphor for such pain. We are not allowed to claim who we are: yet we are reminded of who we are with each... (p. 334-335)

Our "interview" has changed course to talk about the future of Indigeneity in higher education, and I am curious to know if she has seen any dramatic changes or shifts in the past two decades.

**D.M.** says:

Now the numbers of Indigenous scholars and programs in higher education are *astronomical* compared to 20 years ago. Indigenous scholars and educators will

endure what they have to get the work done, and there are a lot of casualties. People 'making it' have lighter skin because that's what and who the academy is making it easier for. They aren't mistaken for janitors. For the future, I am concerned about culture wars and not enough resources for Indigenous folks, faculty, and students. Indigenous people are leaving big tracts in all the arts for the future, and I hope they don't get erased. It's harder to erase us nowadays. Speaking of erasure, there are many forms, and currently people we both know (and value their work) are being "outed" as "fake Indians," or pretendians. We discussed the potential animus toward anyone who is not enrolled in a federally recognized tribe, including the impact of the pretendian list that has been circulating for a few years. **D.M.** had this to say: "Any form of claiming Indigeneity without actually being Indigenous is taking away from those who really are Indigenous and suffered. It is complete dishonesty if a person is claiming to be Indigenous for social status or monetary gain, and that is unacceptable."

I then asked, *Who should be the gatekeepers of Indian identity?*

**D.M.** says:

No one. It's like in cohousing--nobody is in charge because we all come to agreement and compromise. Gatekeeping is about hierarchy and having power over others. To change enrollment policies, individual tribes have to go through the feds so who gets to be Indian and who decides is a much deeper question than tribal councils changing rules. Whether we like it or not, being Indigenous is

a political thing that comes with reparations, tiny reparations, like scholarships and healthcare.

**A.H.C.** responds to a similar question of: *Who gets to decide who is Indian?*

Her family told her, “You don't have to speak for yourself, your actions will cause others to speak for you.” She goes on to say that this is “what a lot of tribal Indigenous communities traditionally relied on--what you had done and what you do and your reliability and accountability and relationship and reciprocity to your community. The tribe will speak for you, and that is what shows who you are and what your role is in a community.”

We then talked about enrollment and citizenship, loss of documentation and missed documentation. Lamented on the history of “non-native people receiving Indian allotments,” as was the government’s intention. Examined the time and place of the southeastern tribes and bands during the removal periods and though the wars, considering where did people go and “how prevalent intermarriage was for survival.” And we talked about how to reclaim a status that was lost in such great numbers, or should we just be fine with being “non-status Indians.”

**A.H.C.** had this to say, without bitterness but most certainly sadness, about being on the pretendian list:

Nobody reached out and asked me. Nobody asked for my story, my family’s history. I have a letter from the Chief of the Eastern Band of Cherokees that I carried around with me for a year or so as proof. I am not enrolled. My father was

not enrolled. But the tribe and community know me, accepts me, knows who I come from.

She goes on to talk about the heartbreaking consequences of being placed on the 'list' as finding out who your real friends are. I comment how very 'unIndigenous' it is to not seek out truth directly from the source, and how the concept of public shaming feels utterly colonial.

Following these two interviews, I left the playa and drove eight hours back to my home on the southern tip of the Salish Sea, replaying the conversations and pulling over on three occasions to write down ideas on my ever-present sticky notes (yes, in my car). Upon return home, I pulled out Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999) searching, searching, then found:

I am visible—see this Indian face—yet I am invisible. I both blind them with my beak nose and am their blind spot. But I exist, we exist. They'd like to think I have melted in the pot. But I haven't, we haven't. The dominant white culture is killing us slowly with its ignorance. By taking away our self-determination, it has made us weak and empty. As a people we have resisted and we have taken expedient positions, but we have never been allowed to develop unencumbered—we have never been allowed to be fully ourselves. The whites in power want us people of color to barricade ourselves behind our separate tribal walls so they can pick us off one at a time with their hidden weapons; so they can whitewash and distort history. Ignorance splits people, creates prejudices. A misinformed people is a subjugated people. (p. 108)

## **Closing Reflections**

Contained in this chapter is a by no means exhaustive overview of the historical framework of identity politics. Exploring the philosophies and intersections of Indigeneity to provide context of how identity politics became deeply imbedded into tribal and Indigenous communities, feathering across the social, cultural, spiritual, and intellectual realms. True power lies in the people, not in politics or economics that shift with the wind. This is not to ignore issues of authentic Indigenous identity or cultural appropriation; however, if the ultimate goal is to not just survive as people but be independent as a distinct group of people with the power to self-determine and the agency to make policy changes, the people are the scaffolding necessary to rebuilding, protecting, and sustaining Indigenous ways of being.

The collaborator stories included in this chapter felt similar in the immediate desire to tell the ancestral and familial story as a means of demonstrating the collaborator's role and place in the cosmology. This is a common Indigenous way to begin a story. Academics would call this positionality. In this case, I call it Relationality. In Reciprocity, I offer this poem by Elizabeth Woody (Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs):

## ***Weaving***

*for Margaret Jim-Pennah and Gladys McDonald*

Weaving baskets you twin the strands into four parts.

Then, another four. The four directions many times.

Pairs of fibers spiral around smaller and smaller sets of threads.

Then, one each time. Spirals hold all this design

airtight and pure. This is our house, over and over.

Our little sisters, Khoush, Sowitk, Piaxi, Wakamu,

the roots will rest inside.

We will be together in this basket.

We will be together in this life. (2020, p.229-230)

## ***CHAPTER FOUR | BLOOD & BELONGING***

### **Community Conundrum**

Identity politics provides a standard to assess, gain, or remove legitimacy from individuals and groups – it is not merit based. Identity politics for Natives means they are individually judged on blood quantum, governmental documentation such as rolls and census, land allotments, and ancestral lineage (but only if documented). Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017) asks this: “What if we had organized outside of the politics of recognition, refused identity politics, and categorically refused the heteropatriarchy of the Indian Act?” (p.177); and a few pages later, inquires: “What if the driving force in Indigenous politics is self-recognition rather than the continual race around the hamster wheel of settler colonial recognition?” (p. 180). While these are questions to ponder for purposes of the future, what are the impacts of not having gone the direction of refusal and mirroring the recognition and belonging systems of the colonizers within the bounds of tribal sovereignty?

Blood Quantum in the modern sense was first “officially” used by the BIA after the passage of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (also known as the Indian Welfare Act). Up to 1934, a person was considered an Indian if they were recognized by their community and lived as an Indian. This definition needed to be changed to reflect a better method of identifying Indians that lived, or would live, away from their home communities. The Indian Relocation Act of 1956 (also known as Public Law 959 or the Adult Vocational Training Program) was a United States law intended to get Natives off their reservations and acquire vocational skills to assimilate into the cities and general

population. Into the 1960s, the assimilation and relocation programs the U.S. put into practice to deal with the Indians once again (also called the Termination Era, which is ongoing into today) needed a better calculation and record of how many Indians they were serving, and along came the Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood to be used regularly as a federal document issued by the BIA. I searched and searched and could find no definitive date that the CDIB card or documentation was first issued. Spruhan, (2018) writes: "It is unclear when the BIA began issuing CDIBs. It appears the CDIB was created at some point for a specific purpose, and then expanded to a general program" (178); and then he goes on to tease out possibilities such as the BIA seeking out half-bloods to enroll in the IRA programs, or a memorandum in the 1940s about how much Indian blood was needed to be entitled to an education loan or Indian preference in employment. "Whatever the specific origin, it is clear that the BIA expanded the CDIB to be a general document that attests to an individual's blood quantum, which was then adopted for purposes beyond the original need for proof of eligibility for specific federal programs" (180). No other group of people has a required document that states blood quantum. There is no scientific method of calculating fractions of blood related to specific cultural, racial, ethnic, or political identity. Blood quantum is a fantastical and fictional concept that is a settler-colonial tool to oppress Indigenous Americans.

Annie Cecilia Smith (Yakama) writes in her prose poem, *Not Indian Enough*, with a healthy dose of mirth and truth:

...Still, there's a deeper issue of Indianness. Of course, there is no such thing as being too much of an Indian. I do worry about being Indian enough. I don't know how to speak my language. Does speaking my only English make me less of an

Indian? I don't know many of the stories. Stories. Stories that tell my history. My past. If I don't know where I came from, how will I go forward and live life as a "real" Indian?...Here is the "real" answer. It is not the White people nor the Indian people who measure how much an Indian really is—only you can measure how much Indian you really are....(2002, p. 144)

The section of this poem, from my reading and interpretation, carries a tone of both earnestness and facetiousness, as these two seemingly contradictory descriptors are often together when creating art that speaks to human atrocities and cultural survival. The questions surrounding Native American identity, tribal identity, and what is self-determination remain relevant today. In Bronwyn Carlson's (2011) thesis, "The politics of identity: who counts as aboriginal today?" she examines how aboriginal identity was and is formed, from the binary of identity politics enforced by the government to the objection to identity boundaries found in recent generations, particularly surrounding mixed-heritage people. Investigating the thematic struggles around who is and who is not aboriginal (Australian, indicating Indigenous) and what constitutes evidence of being aboriginal, she states:

Questions arise whether descent is sufficient to claim an Aboriginal identity or whether the lived experience of being part of the Aboriginal community suffices, or whether each of the three parts of the definition must be demonstrated to confirm Aboriginality. (p.149)

This three-part identifying rubric is similar to what we circle around on Turtle Island and reminds me of a conversation with a Native colleague. The current events unfolding between Israel and Hamas and Palestine have brought into question: Who is

Indigenous? Furthermore, if a group of people experiences dispossession of their homeland (the land and place they are Indigenous to) spanning hundreds or thousands of years, are they still Indigenous to that place, and are they also Indigenous to the places and spaces they settled (providing there were no original people)? And, if they are Indigenous, do they have a legitimate claim to their original homeland regardless of time lapsed?

To recap the qualifiers, from a social and cultural perspective, of being Indigenous or Aboriginal or Tribal: familial descendancy, lived experience which presumes cultural ways of knowing and being, and community acceptance and belonging. In this research, the essence of identity is examined through historical, traditional practices, the strategies of settler-colonialism and Manifest Destiny, and the contemporary workings of identity formations from a socio-political and socio-cultural viewpoint. Where does the ancestral concept of identity begin, and where is it found today in the complexities of identity politics? Are there allegiances to certain ways of identifying (blood quantum, base rolls) that serve a purpose other than the act of being and living Indigenous?

Identity creates tension. Identity politics feasts upon that tension. How a human chooses to identify is both internal and external in reality. The internal and external may not be cogent, nor congruent with each other, causing tension. From a settler-colonial framework, this is the perfect realizing of identity politics for Indigenous people; the individual and the group fight, the groups fight each other, and the diversion from pressing issues that could pivot more power (back) to those same groups creates the murky waters that identity politics swims beneath. Carlson (2011) shares this about

positioning her understanding of contemporary Indigenous identities through concepts of hegemony and colonization: “An important assumption of my approach is that the complexity of identity formation cannot be neatly reduced to fit the accepted meanings and logic of current Aboriginal identity discourses without also submerging the diversity of Aboriginal experiences...” (p. 173). This resonates deeply. I am exploring what is already in place in terms of identity formation for tribal peoples, but also

Throughout my analytical approach to the data and information, I do not claim to be an expert or understand that which I question. My analysis of identity politics is a constant balancing of the body, heart, mind, and spirit that is propelled forward by my personal belief in relationality and reciprocity as cornerstones of humanity—and truth in story.

### ***Historical Contextualization of Race***

The formation of the United States of America didn't create race, racism, classism, or even genocide (although the most massive “case” of genocide in our modern history) and never at any point in the history of this country, did all lives matter. Nor has the USA been a binary of white vs. black in terms of race; “it hasn't been just about black and white, but about Filipino, Hawaiian, Samoan, and Chamoru (from Guam), too, among other identities. Race has not only shaped lives, it's shaped the country itself—where the borders went, who has counted as ‘American’” (Immerwahr, 2019, pg. 12). Race, as we all know, is a social construct where the implication is that this makes race's power (and privilege) somehow less, or more palatable, because we can intellectualize it out of being? This is most assuredly not the case for people

experiencing racism. All thoughts and concepts are socially constructed, and wielded by those empowered to control the rest, the unempowered. Recently, I heard three Native people (in academia), on three separate occasions, state that *Indians are not a race* in the political and legal sense, this is true--Indians are a political group, not racial. But what is the proverbial war over? Is it to move away from racial identifiers necessary in transformative justice and equity? Are we playing into identity politics by agreeing that the only Indians who are to be counted and valued in the political realm (where the power exists) must be enrolled in federally recognized tribes?

The US census of 2020 showed a relatively dramatic uptick in people self-identifying as American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) but this data does not only account for the number of legal AI/AN people, those who are enrolled in a federally recognized tribe and possess a BIA card of proof. The census allows for self-identification, no “proof” is required. Similarly, the data for Native students enrolled in colleges and universities, and the graduation rates for Native students are not accurate in the legal definition of an American Indian or Alaskan Native. In my assessment, this is a prime example of identity politics coming out of both sides of the proverbial mouth and positioning Indigenous identity as a pawn. Doerfler (2002) looks at identity as one of the most “critical and contentious issues for Americans Indians, including Anishinaabeg” and continues with “...the American racialization of American Indian identity has not only proven to be counter to American Indian conceptions of identity, but has also served to erase and disenfranchise American Indians” (p. 1). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a lens through which to view the contemporary world—from interpersonal and

group dynamics/relationships to governmental controls/policies. CRT can be described and defined through the insight that:

...racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Because it is an ingrained feature of our landscape, racism looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture...Our social world, with its rules, practices, and assignments of prestige and power, is not fixed; rather, we construct it with words, stories, and silence.

(Delgado, Steffancic, 2013, p.2)

And underlying the premise of CRT is “interest convergence,” developed by Derrick Bell that supposes white dominant people in power will only “tolerate or encourage racial advances for blacks when these also promote white self-interest” (Delgado, Steffancic, 2013, p. 2-3). CRT was developed as a means to consider racism in America from the binary of white and black, using race as the main tenant; however, the theory can be expanded to evaluate any of the oppressed and marginalized peoples (race, ethnicity, culture, class) ongoing fights for equality and truthful representation in the story of America. Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields in *Racecraft* state:

While the “white races” of the past became ethnic groups, the opposite has happened to the census category “Hispanic.” Discussing the “mark one or more” option that appeared for the first time on the 2000 census, a reporter dutifully explained that “Hispanic” designates an ethnicity, not a race, and the “Hispanics can be of any race.” Whatever the official rationale claimed, a new “minority” was born. (2014, p. 47)

Racism feeds into the capitalistic system of oppression. Blood quantum and any mechanisms for identifying people through governmental controls (federal, state, or

tribal) are inherently problematic. A group of people possessing legal (and socio-economic) power over another group of people and their identity, well-being, belonging, and political/economic status is a forced assimilation. The dangling carrot is freedom, yet that freedom includes borders that challenge the very conception of true freedom. It is important to keep in mind that Native Americans in the U.S. could not practice their own religious ceremonies until Congress passed the American Indian Religious Freedom Act 1978. For context, that “right” was given to federally enrolled tribal members only 45 years ago. The U.S. Constitution was determined to be established in 1789 which was 234 years ago; putting the math together is to state that the original people of Turtle Island were denied the right to practice their culture and ways of being for almost 200 years. I argue that in this form, racism is not simply a by-product of settler-colonialism, but holds hands with white-supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and is a prime motivator for identity politics to exist.

Colonization and subsequent oppression, particularly settler-colonialism, aim to control resources—all natural resources, from water and land to humans. In the modern world where money begets power begets control, “owning” natural resources creates identities of the subjugated peoples that work for, not against the mainstream, white supremacist systems, and can perpetuate lateral violence among the identified “others.” While the Native American is not considered a racial group, the racialization that erupted from settler-colonialism cannot be dismissed. Globally, Indigenous people are presented with different modalities and mechanisms of “othering” that include social, cultural, and political elements; to separate these, through identity politics, is to weaken overall the resistance to settler-colonialism. Yet, as Duane Champagne (2015) writes:

Indigeneity is not expressed as a common identity, culture, or government. There is no common Indigenous identity, there are a large number of Indigenous identities. The common cause that unites contemporary Indigenous peoples at the international level is the result of similar threats from nation states that do not fully recognize Indigenous claims to land, self-government, culture, and other Indigenous rights. There is a common threat but each Indigenous nation defends specific cultures, lands, history, and forms of self-government that are autonomous to the full-range of other Indigenous peoples. (p. 2)

Indigenous groups cognizant of the damage the historical and colonizer narrative creates and focusing on expanding their own narrative and truth through academia, activism, or the arts and humanities will push the current limitations of sovereignty into a true form of sovereign power. It is my argument that at the core of claiming Indigenous sovereignty, the collective indigenous peoples--inclusive of the "mixed-race" or unrecognized--must exercise their rights together, by making alliances and treaties with one another, through education and correction of the historical (and contemporary) narratives that serve only to thwart survival and progress in indigenous communities world-wide.

In academics, we know that race is a social construct; however, that doesn't negate the impact of racism through the settler-colonial project. Indigenous peoples and chattel slaves, particularly slaves from the continent of Africa, were/are racialized differently in ways that support/ed the logics and aims of settler colonialism (the erasure of the Indigenous person and the capture and containment of the slave). "Settler nativism, through the claiming of a long-lost ancestor, invests in these specific

racializations of Indigenous people and Black people, and disbelieves the sovereign authority of Indigenous nations to determine tribal membership” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 12-13). How is this different than lineal descent for some tribes to “prove” eligibility for enrollment?

As sovereign nations, tribes make decisions about who is considered a member, so our interest is not in whether adoptions are appropriate or legitimate. Rather, because the prevalence of the adoption narrative in American literature, film, television, holidays and history books far exceeds the actual occurrences of adoptions, we are interested in how this narrative spins a fantasy that an individual settler can become innocent, indeed heroic and indigenized, against a backdrop of national guilt. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 14)

Yet, there is no evidence that the famous people we hear about being adopted are representative of the “actual occurrences of adoptions” --yes, if the context is only from the media portrayal, I concur that the Indian adoption trope is well-played out and serves to further dismiss and misrepresent tribal people as a whole. I am not addressing the topic of Indigenous identity through a tribal sovereignty lens as I am not an enrolled member of a tribe. I am looking at it through a critical lens of identity politics and belonging. I am seeking to understand and connect the traditional, historical, and contemporary ways in which individual and community Indigenous identity has been practiced.

Kim Tallbear (2013) asked the question:

...as genetic identities and historical narratives command increasing attention in society, will they come to rival as legitimate grounds for identity claims the

existing historical dash legal foundations of indigenous governance authority? In the States, that authority is treaties and case law. If so, we will see a transformation, not an end, to controversy and indigenous citizenship and Native American racial identity, adding to a growing genetic fetishism in the broader society. (p. 10)

She goes on to state that Native Americans have been racialized in the American culture. In her assessment, “citizenship is key to sovereignty, which is key to maintaining our land bases” (p. 32). As is a repeated missive from many scholars examining the role racialization plays in marginalized, underrepresented groups of people, Tallbear asserts that race has been forced upon Native Americans and maintains that “race politics over the centuries in both Europe and the United States have conditioned our experiences and opportunities, including the federal tribal relationship. They have impinged upon our ability as indigenous peoples to exercise self-governance.” (p. 32). Operating from the premise that race is a social construct, one could presume that another concept would be as adequately applied to any group of people being oppressed; race is the container and without it, there would be another container of equal power to disenfranchise and dispossess people of their inherent rights. Racialization, multiculturalism, anything that separates and others, is a form of “divide and conquer” and is a systematic tool used for oppression by dominant societies to exert their identity expectations as protection of their place and power. It is a framework of war--fracturing of the opponent(s) so that mass mobilization never happens to effectively challenge the dominant power, thus preserving status quo.

In modern times, there are check boxes and governmental issued cards that create identity. Many have blended: families, races, cultures, and identity based on skin color, education, family name, religion, place of origin, and economic status creating a conundrum for many as to where they belong. Identity is defined as “the state of fact of remaining the same one or ones, as under varying aspects or conditions” (“identity”), and belonging is “acceptance as a natural member or part” (“belonging”). Working from these definitions, identity is who you are, who you feel or say you are, and belonging is apart from identity in that others must accept you into the group. Indigenous is defined as “naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving from another place” (“indigenous”); therefore, Indigenous identity appears clean-cut to mean that if you are from a place or country, you are indigenous. This by no means explains the concept of belonging, even if one is of Indigenous identity.

Within this framework it is plain to see how the “mixed-race” people who are part Indigenous and part from another place can identify as part of a group such as a tribe, yet still not belong. We no longer have the freedom to decide for ourselves, or within a particular group, truly who belongs--legally--without the constraints of the politics and economics of the region. I use the term region because in most settler colonized lands, the ultimate power lies with the settler-formed government, and in the United States, there is the layering of the federal government over the state government to the county and city governments. In my experience, there is no consensus regarding the controversial subject of tribal enrollment with federally recognized tribes’ people. The very parameters of declaring a person or persons into a membership involves the capitalist vetting of said person/persons; the decision appears to go way beyond

traditional kinship and community relations, due to limited resources stemming from a place of economic stability or growth; even the natural resources are viewed through a lens of economics. Take fishing for example, if more members are enrolled who then have fishing rights, and the number of fish are limited, then there is less fish, less money for the existing members. In this situation, I have heard un-enrolled members of communities express the desire to belong, regardless of if they received per capita or fishing/hunting rights; and would even forfeit such inherent and acquired rights to be a bona fide, recognized tribal member.

With the wide-reaching use of the blood quantum method of determining U.S, federal tribal membership, the Indigenous Peoples of North America will eventually run out of Indian blood, regardless of racial categorization or not. This phenomenon also leaves a very narrow margin for the multiracial or mixed-race generations to claim a specific tribal identity or belong, based on fractionalized blood. Proof of identity, for Indigenous Peoples, is not simply a by-product of colonization, but is a promotion of continued colonization, an acquiescence continual oppression and undermining of true sovereignty. Michelle R. Montgomery (2012) in "Identity Politics: the Mixed-Race American Indian Experience," states:

Similar to historical government policies and laws that determined the (monoracial)'one-drop' rule for blacks, current policies rely on blood quantum for federal tribal recognition or tribal enrollment...blood quantum is used as a device to categorize people based on the power structures of 'whiteness,' ....Tribal sovereignty does not shield a race group, above all mixed-race American

Indians, from the social and political structures of the legacy of white supremacy.  
(p.1-2)

Traditionally, if Indigenous identity and belonging, although not interchangeable, was developed by enacting a social structure that benefitted the totality of the community where individuals incurred roles (belonging) that situated their position (identity) within their community, then the settler-colonial construction was in direct opposition for in this social system, the community served the individual. Euro-settlers identified people by physicality and socio-economic status (all in the area of Body in the medicine wheel framework); whereas tribal communities considered all aspects of a person—body, mind, heart, and spirit. This way of being negates the white-supremacist concepts of mixed-race, mixed-blood, external wealth, and a stratified society. For the sake of sovereignty:

A legal word for an ordinary concept—the authority to self-govern. Tribal nations ceded millions of acres of land that made the United States what it is today and, in return, received the guarantee of ongoing self-government on their own lands. The treaties and laws create what is known as the federal ‘trust responsibility,’ to protect both tribal lands and tribal government, and to provide for federal assistance to ensure the success of tribal communities. (NCAI)

Tribal sovereignty, including the right to certain federal assistance, is only for Native Americans who are enrolled citizens of federally recognized tribes on Turtle Island. How can Native American or American Indian/Alaskan Native on the United States Census, which occurs every ten years for the purpose of acquiring a picture of the population,

and per the Census Bureau: “We ask a question about a person's race to create statistics about race and to present other estimates by race groups,” be counted by self-identification within the census framework, when AI/AN identity is a specific tribal sovereignty issue? The census findings are critical factors in determining funding, policies, and civil rights of marginalized groups, as well as to evaluate and assess government-funded programs for equity. One of the pages, “Race,” on the United States Census Bureau website, states the following:

The U.S. Census Bureau collects racial data in accordance with the 1997 Office of Management and Budget standards on race and ethnicity. The data on race are based on self-identification and the categories on the form generally reflect a social definition of race. The categories are not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically. Respondents can mark more than one race on the form to indicate their racial mixture.

### **Identity Politics: Commingling Culture, Economics, & Sovereignty**

Sandy Grande (2004) in *Red Pedagogy*, discusses the notion of authenticity as it relates “essentialist” theories, that is, “theories of identity that treat race (and other aspects of identity) as a stable and homogenous construct...” (p. 92). Grande’s main argument, and I agree, is that “by displacing the real sites of struggle (sovereignty and self-determination), the discourse of identity politics ultimately obfuscates the real sources of oppression--colonialism and global capitalism” (2004, p. 92). Her research in the realm of identity politics for Indigenous peoples takes firm hold within academia; the theorists and academics, who research and identify ways to explain the so-called

identity-crisis among many indigenous populations. My issue is what about the voices of the actual people who are involved in this identity-crisis? There are interviews and surveys, but by no means does this allow for an accurate picture of the layers of indigenous identity and belonging. Grande's bigger message is that by understanding the historical and colonial practices that created the "identity paradox" (2004, p. 95) for Native Americans, these continue to lead us into the future without disrupting the "whitestream theories of identity" (2004, p. 95) that not only adhere to, but promote colonization. Grande further explores the concept of "ethnic switching" which she says researchers attribute to the increasing numbers of people who identify as Native American on the U.S. census and how this phenomenon could be related to the economic and social capital associated with being Native American in today's world. This begs the question, how does cultural appropriation or identity appropriation play into the identity and belonging in indigenous communities? Traditionally, if kinship or relationship were the primary measures of who belonged, from being identified as a member of the group, then where does that place a "pretendian" or a person who newly discovers their heritage? For what if they are part of a community, are accepted and belong--there is still the practice of many indigenous groups of adoption, but in today's capitalistic world, not many are officially "enrolled," yet remain in the community because they belong. Are these outliers? Exceptions?

The goal to survival in the postcolonial time and space, as Grande puts it is that the "search for 'comfortable modern identities' remains integral to the quest for sovereignty. Grande proposes using the construct of the Indigena, "it claims a distinctively indigenous space shaped by and through a matrix of legacy, power, and

ceremony. Embodying Indigena is about the choice to live differently, about standing in defiance of the vapid emptiness of the whitestream, and about resisting the kind of education where connections to Earth and the spirit world are looked upon with skepticism and derision" (2004, p. 171). Only by recognizing the value of Indigenous identity as a method of survival, as well as a method of resistance to ongoing colonization and encroachment on tradition and culture, we are practicing sovereignty. Jessica Bardill (Cherokee) restates what we already know of Indigenous communities in the context of belonging and identity, "Traditionally, tribal membership was determined through systems of kinship, clan, and even adoption. Whether the result of warfare, orphaning, marriage, or other social transaction, adoption allowed individuals to find belonging in a tribe or clan, many times not the one into which they were born" (n.d.). In modern times, if we consider the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 33, that states:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to determine their own identity or membership in accordance with their customs and traditions. This does not impair the right of indigenous individuals to obtain citizenship of the States in which they live.

If we take this first declaration as it is stated, one could reasonably presume to identify themselves as a member within their own rights of self-determination, within "their customs and traditions;" and this does not state who determines the customs and traditions. This declaration is also presuming, or ignoring perhaps, the fact that each indigenous group of people is over-governed by the settler-colonial powers. For example, if an Indigenous person in the U.S. wanted to self-determine as Indigenous,

politically and legally such identity would have no weight or power if the 1) tribe or nation under which said Indigenous person identifies with is not federally recognized, and 2) if the tribe or nation are federally recognized, their enrollment and membership criteria would have to be met. On face value, the declaration is great and speaks of self-determination of Indigenous peoples; however, the on-going colonization and assimilation or eradication methods that settler-colonial powers exercise over Indigenous peoples has not been thwarted by any declaration.

This is evidenced within the U.S. as:

While tribal sovereignty enables tribes to determine their own membership, in most cases and particularly for tribes applying for recognition, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) maintains a role of review for those requirements through the CFR” placing “particular limits and expectations upon newly recognized and many reorganized tribes. (Bardill, n.d.)

For comparison, looking at the determining criteria for the indigenous Māori of New Zealand to be recognized as Māori, as well as have equality as citizens of New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi sets the framework and foundation for Māori sovereignty and self-determination. The New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings defines and counts Māori “in two ways in the census: through ethnicity and through Māori descent. Māori ethnicity and Māori descent are different concepts-- ethnicity refers to cultural affiliation, while descent is about ancestry. Ethnicity is the ethnic group or groups that a person identifies with or feels they belong to” (Gleisner et al., 2015). I am most curious about the way in which “ethnicity” is defined and used,

compared to the North American usage, defined as a noun, “1. an ethnic group: a social group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or the like 2. ethnic traits, background, allegiance, or association” (“ethnicity”). This working definition, as applied to indigenous peoples, other than “background” (ambiguous at best), does not overtly state descendancy, and Duane Champagne (2015) believes “ethnicity and indigeneity are two different forms of cultural identity” (par. 1).

Champagne further asserts that:

Based on personal circumstances and an encouraging policy environment from modernizing nations states, many people of indigenous descent choose to abandon indigenous tribal identities. Some take up identities as detribalized indigenous people, or metis as in Canada, mestizos as in Latin American and South America, or as ethnic Indians in the United States. (par. 3)

Champagne’s claims, I argue, are not rooted in historical context, nor give appropriate due to the mechanisms of settler-colonialism and oppression that forced, not “choose to abandon,” many indigenous people to leave their homeland, their indigenous ways of life, and to put aside cultural practices to survive. I also argue that Champagne’s notion of “take up identities” further enforced the view that “mixed-race” people have forged an identity outside of their indigenous roots when the terms “metis” and “mestizo” were attached to mixed-race people by the colonizers and oppressors. Also, *mestizo* is most commonly a term found in Mexico, Latin America, and the Philippines; and mestizo is used to describe Indigenous people from Mexico that have mixed Indigenous (Amerindian) and European heritage. It is not always a positive word because of the caste-like system the Spanish colonizers imposed on the Indigenous Peoples of

Mexico. I have the word “mestiza” tattooed on my inner forearm, in the pages of an open book; the symbolism for me is my transparency of my identity. My praxis is one of a mixed-race woman, thus I own and account for my biases and views based upon personal experiences “fence-walking” and invisible border-crossing between Indigenous Native American/Mexican and the White worlds. But to be clear, I also hadn't researched the term extensively (this was also pre-cell phones), and don't know if I would pursue this line of reasoning (or tattoo) today.

### **Autoethnography: My Heritage**

Can the question of Native identity, in all its complexity, be addressed in a research project—no; but the stories and findings herein can offer a full picture of what is at stake socially and politically, and address misconceptions that permeate the national conversation. “Indian identity is complicated--especially for Indians who inhabit it...Natives may possess all, some, or none of the social constructs--race, ethnicity, or legal standing--commonly used in their identity formation” (Robertson, 2013, p. 115). There are a plethora of reasons why a person who identifies as Native is not considered Native by their tribe or tribes, or the U.S. government—from not making blood quantum, being a part of the relocation movement, being an adoptee, to not having ancestors on government rolls.

I identify as my whole self and believe in transparency in these current times when identity politics are fraught. I owe it to my students who are struggling with their identity. The ubiquitous question, “What are you?” permeates most of my social interactions; it has since as far back as my memory reaches (around age 4). I am rarely

offended by this question, albeit it is annoying at times. This is the crux of determining an “authentic” Indigenous identity, especially in the United States, where if you are not a card-carrying Indian, well, then what kind of Indian are you?

Indigenous communities experience substantial conflict about who meets the criteria for being a ‘real’ Indian. Both academic literature and the latest United States census confirm that multitudes of Native Americans are navigating between their everyday experiences of being Indian and their lack of legal identity as tribal members of federally recognized tribes... Yet many do not have the ability to confirm their heritage because of socio-historical complexity and exclusivity of the criteria to do so. (Robertson, p. 13,16)

I can trace my ancestry and provide “proof” of who I am and who I belong to, but that does not make me a legal Indian. My ancestors from my paternal grandfather’s side were a blended group from the early 1600s, beginning with the male settlers marrying into the Chowanoke or Chowan, in the geographical area known as North Carolina, then as settler-colonial encroachment and violence continued, moving south into Mississippi Territory (currently the states of Alabama, Mississippi, southern Tennessee) and the Cherokee in the early 1700s then inter-marrying with the Choctaw in the late 1700s. In 1830, during President Andrew Jackson’s Termination Era and the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty of 1831, many Choctaw families, along with other tribes and bands, were forced on the Trail of Tears—where many lost their lives and loved ones en route to Indian Territory (now Oklahoma state); however, not everyone left their homelands, and not everyone settled in Indian Territory.

My beloved Grandfather (1901-2007) sitting at his kitchen table, or in his favorite recliner, would tell me stories about his Great, Great Grandmother walking days to where the Indian post was and returning home reporting that the Indian agent documenting names for allotments, Colonel Ward, was “drunk and ill-mannered.” The same Great Grandmother sold her Choctaw land allotment (there was a provision in the Dancing Rabbit Creek Treaty for those who remained in Mississippi to receive a land allotment) and left with her husband to find a new place to settle. They ended up in Crawford County, Missouri around 1832 but settled in Topaz County, Missouri a few years later.

The following are documented details of Colonel Ward’s (Choctaw Indian Agent) time in Mississippi territory:

William Ward was appointed March 1, 1821, as the U.S. Agent to the Choctaw in Mississippi, replacing John McKee.[4] His appointment likely came by virtue of being the brother-in-law of Richard Mentor Johnson (1780-1850). The recently approved Treaty of Doak's Stand traded Choctaw land in Mississippi for an area west of the Mississippi River. By July 1821, Ward was fully installed and working toward the goal of "all tribesmen on the land ceded in 1820 to leave Mississippi now." [4] Although, this treaty failed to convince the Choctaw to leave, the succeeding Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek in 1830 proved more successful, of which Ward was a witness. He continued to serve in his capacity as Agent until 1833, when so few Choctaw remained in Mississippi that his post was eliminated. For many of "the members of the tribe electing to remain in Mississippi, they failed to receive their allotments through the hostility and neglect of Ward." [5]

These acts, and many out right frauds, made Ward's work for the U.S.

Government suspect. Beginning in 1842, after his decease, many investigations of his activities as Agent were conducted, right into the early twentieth century.[4] (4.0 4.1 4.2 DeRosier, Arthur H. The Removal of the Choctaw Indians. Univ. of Tennessee Pr., 1989. pgs 75, 88, 136-137 and Debo, Angie. The Rise and Fall of the Choctaw Republic. Univ. of Oklahoma Pr., 1934. pg 207)

My Freeman family line (the Grandmother above was a Freeman, nee Ball) was listed on the 1890 Indian Census and when the Final Dawe's Rolls opened between 1887-1904, seventy-seven of my ancestors, including my Grandfather, my Great Grandmother, and my Great, Great Grandmother applied for their rights as Mississippi Choctaw Indians and were refused on June 15, 1904, by a Muskogee territory Chairman and two commissioners. From records, the consolidated family application was under a John Bennight who appealed the refusal and won his case shortly before he passed (there is record of him receiving a check from the BIA in 1905 but no documentation of what it was for). Other family members (Freeman, but not my direct line) are on the Final Rolls of Cherokee Nation 1907. It is estimated that during this re-opening period to be placed on the Dawes Rolls or "Final Rolls" for tribal membership in the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokees, Creeks, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Seminoles), of the 2,597 applicants, only 1,457 received approval.

Dawes Rolls applicants listed as Identified Mississippi Choctaw experienced an application process that was different than that of other enrollees. The Dawes Commission made judgments based on an applicant's 'Choctaw characteristics,'

such as their appearance or ability to speak the Choctaw language.

(*okhistory.org*)

I have all the applications, and it is true that nobody was fluent in the Choctaw language, as it is also true—if one is to believe the government’s assessment—that some family members presented physically with white characteristics, and many others were documented as non-white in physical presentation (black hair, black eyes, medium and medium dark complexion). Settler-colonizers married into tribes created my paternal lineage of mixed-heritage. This piece of my ancestry follows the family lines of Hoyter, Freeman, Ball, James, Jenkins, and McDaniel. Where does this legacy leave generations to follow?

### **Identity & Removal**

The collection of research stories in *Ora, Healing Ourselves: Indigenous Knowledge, Healing and Wellbeing* (2023) provides the thought-provoking and relevant chapter, “Re-Storying and Relational Restoration – Yappalli Transformation of Trauma Through Land-Based Healing” by Michelle Johnson-Jennings and Karina Walters, they discuss the forced removal of the Choctaw and remind us of the seven grandmothers, and thus women’s vital roles:

On 27th of September 1830, the seven grandmothers representing the Choctaws refused the Treaty of dancing Creek and left (Pesantubbee, 2005). The Choctaws collectively chose to refuse the treaty and leave with the grandmothers, except Greenwood Leflore, who lingered behind.” (2023, p. 243)

The outcome of this meeting, per se, was that the treaty was signed, whether purposefully by Greenwood Leflore and other principal chiefs, or under duress—both stories exist—most of the Choctaw were forced to leave their homelands and walk the Trail of Tears to Oklahoma. Was this the first break from traditional practices of listening and following the wisdom of the seven grandmothers? Possible, indeed, and what is clear is that the next two hundred years (as we rapidly approach 2030), Indigenous women are still living and feeling the impacts of settler-colonization and the practices of “civilizing” Indigenous groups by replacing egalitarian gender roles with Christian patriarchy.

This colonial land disruption significantly harmed the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional health of the Choctaws, especially Choctaw women. Indigenous women's leadership roles, in particular, were attacked and eroded by settler colonialism person (Pesantubbee, 2005)....The assault on Indigenous women and gender roles further interrupts their connection to the land, their ability to teach their ancestor's wise practices, their parenting practices and their ability to heal – making their health a prime concern. (2023, p. 245)

Andrew Jackson's Message to Congress about Indian Removal Act, December 6th, 1830,, gives the attitude and righteousness of how to deal with the “Indian problem” straight from the traitor's mouth:

It gives me pleasure to announce to Congress that the benevolent policy of the Government, steadily pursued for nearly thirty years, in relation to the removal of the Indians beyond the white settlements is approaching to a happy consummation....The consequences of a speedy removal will be important to the

United States, to individual States, and to the Indian themselves... It will place a dense and civilized population in large tracts of country now occupied by a few savage hunters....By opening the whole territory between Tennessee on the north and Louisiana on the south to the settlement of the whites it will incalculably strengthen the southwestern frontier... It will relieve the whole State of Mississippi and the western part of Alabama of Indian occupancy, and enable those States to advance rapidly in population, wealth, and power. It will separate the Indians from immediate contact with settlements of whites; free them from the power of the States; enable them to pursue happiness in their own way and under their own rude institutions; will retard the progress of decay, which is lessening their numbers, and perhaps cause them gradually, under the protection of the Government and through the influence of good counsels, to cast off their savage habits and become an interesting, civilized, and Christian community...What good man would prefer a country covered with forests and ranged by a few thousand savages to our extensive Republic, studded with cities, towns, and prosperous farms embellished with all the improvements which art can devise or industry execute, occupied by more than 12,000,000 happy people, and filled with all the blessings of liberty, civilization, and religion?....To save him from this alternative, or perhaps utter annihilation, the General Government kindly offers him a new home, and proposes to pay the whole expense of his removal and settlement.

My Grandfather, born only seventy years after this land theft and destruction of his grandparent's homelands, was seventy when I was born. In 140 years, the legacy of

removal and eradication and ultimately survival is still a living story. My Grandfather wanted me to be educated (survival) and proud of my heritage—this is his legacy; this is what I will leave for my children. The map below shows the routes that Indian people were forced to take on their removal to Indian Territory (Oklahoma). My Grandfather's family made a home southwest of Springfield, Missouri.

**Figure 8**

*Trail of Tears, routes*



Logically, there was only a finite amount of land, or allotments, in the designated Indian Territory of Oklahoma, and it makes sense that the U.S. would not accept everyone who had Indian blood, especially since the over-arching policy was one of genocide and eradication of ongoing attempts at “civilizing” through assimilation. It is estimated that there were over 250,000 people who applied to the Commission for the Five Civilized Tribes (Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole), also

referred to as the Dawes Rolls for enrollment in their tribes and land allotments, yet under 100,000 were approved between 1896-1905 (“Dawes Commission Enrollment,” 2016). More than half the people who identified as Indian were denied by the U.S. government. I cannot locate accurate data to report a concrete number but can assess through analyzing hundreds of records that many head of households (e.g., men) that were issued allotments, were not Indian but married to an Indian woman. One must not forget—how could anyone—that America was founded on the fundamental belief that women were less than and the patriarchy was perfectly executed during the allotment process. In addition to yet another shining example of how blood quantum is a settler-colonial contrived tool of oppression and eradication, the Rolls themselves show how arbitrary and subjective the process was.

This is the benchmark, the cornerstone—Dawes Rolls and other Indian rolls that came after, government initiated and controlled—that predominately set the course for tribal enrollment and citizenship across Turtle Island. This is identity politics used for purposes of enacting westward expansion, Manifest Destiny, and genocide of Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous ancestry, different from federally recognized tribal citizenship, is not a concept; it is a living, breathing entity that does not simply disappear because settler-colonial, capitalistic powers want it to. The fight for identity and belonging in Indigenous communities will continue beyond (white) man-made laws and policies, oppression tactics, and the idealized versions of the “real” Indian.

## Identity & Sovereignty

Since 1974, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that (federally recognized) tribes were self-governing nations (not racial groups) and had the right to determine who belonged (members or citizens) to the tribe. To parse this out, first a tribe needed to establish a governing body, and many chose Tribal Councils with elected chairs (typical western hierarchal positions) and the rest of the members were General Council. The term limits and particulars of the governing tribal bodies are individual to each tribe; however, the people in these positions, of let's just call it what it is--power—can and do change with elections, deaths, and other changes of life. The systems are similar to how the U.S. Congress (The House of Representatives and The Senate) works in terms of deciding rules and laws and being voted in by constituents. The point is, a select group of people decide *things* for the rest of the people, and this is called governing. Things like enrollment, and consequentially, disenrollment--who belongs and who does not belong.

Tailyr Irvine, a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and photojournalist, created a photo essay, "Reservation Mathematics: Navigating Love in Native America," that's goal was to "show what is otherwise invisible, blood quantum." In an interview on the Smithsonian's Sidedoor program, she says:

Its like, how do you photograph blood quantum? How do you photograph something that doesn't exist? How do you make that visual? The only other things in America that use blood quantum are pedigrees with horses and dogs. And so, you have horses, dogs, and then you have Native American, where a full breed is considered a good thing, which is such a bizarre concept.

The conversation continues, adding David Wilkins, member of the Lumbee Nation, scholar and author, into the mix and moderated by Lizzie Peabody:

**Tailyr Irvine:** Because historically, tribes have always intermarried, and when someone left one tribe to marry into another, they became part of that tribe and their kid is part of that tribe.

**Lizzie Peabody:** So, blood quantum, it was not a thing in pre-colonial America?

**David Wilkins:** No. I mean, for native people, genealogy mattered intensely, but that wasn't the way your identity was defined necessarily.

**Lizzie Peabody:** This is David Wilkins. He's a Political Scientist at the University of Richmond, and a member of the Lumbee Nation. He says historically, tribal identity wasn't just about lineage.

**David Wilkins:** It was all about kinship, is the way it's best understood. And the word kinship is an all-encompassing term that embraces not only your immediate blood kin, but the people that you are married or connected to, your friends.

**Lizzie Peabody:** Even sometimes, your enemies.

**David Wilkins:** People would be captured in spats. They became indoctrinated in the values of that community and their allegiance became to that community. And that determined their identity.

**Lizzie Peabody:** David says this notion of blood quantum arrived in America with the Europeans.

**David Wilkins:** The European heads of state were very keen on heredity. Right? Having the right kind of blood before they could ascend to the throne. And they brought that with them when they came to the Americas. Virginia was actually the first colony to introduce blood quantum for African-Americans and for native peoples in the state.

**Lizzie Peabody:** But blood quantum didn't apply to African-Americans and Native Americans in the same way.

**David Wilkins:** And that's where it gets interesting. The planters and the elites wanted more slaves. Right? And so, they adopted the one drop rule. Right? Anybody with one drop could be determined to be African-American. How one determined that one drop is anybody's guess, but that was the designation that they used, because you needed more slaves to keep the plantation system alive, and so on.

**Lizzie Peabody:** Right. One drop of black blood made you black. Native peoples on the other hand could only get less native. The child of a native and a non-native person was called a halfbreed. And this was by design. See, the Dawes Act is a critical law, designed to be the ultimate weapon to assimilate Indigenous peoples. In 1887, Congress passed the Dawes Act, which took reservation lands communally held by tribes, and broke them into smaller pieces of private land, or allotments, to distribute among individual Native Americans, which meant the government needed a list of Native Americans. So, they sent agents out to reservations, basically to do a roll call.

**David Wilkins:** When you look at the roles, the so-called Dawes Roles, you see the agents sometimes listing that such and such was four fourths, or one half or 1/32. So, it begins to pop up.

**Lizzie Peabody:** Four fourths for full-blooded, one half for half-blooded and so on. Not all names had blood quantum fractions associated with them on the Dawes Rolls, but this was the start of something that would become more and more common in the coming years. Because throughout this assimilation period, as reservation lands were carved up and doled out, the federal government assured recipients that their property would be protected. But little by little, the goalpost for that protection began to move. And in 1917, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs is like, "Actually, we're only going to protect your land if you have more than one half Native American blood." If you had less than one half native blood...

**David Wilkins:** You were on your own, you no longer had any federal protection. Your lands were deluged by land speculators and state officials, all wanting to gain title to your allotment.

**Lizzie Peabody:** You lost your federal protections.

**David Wilkins:** Exactly.

**Lizzie Peabody:** So, one half blood quantum becomes this official benchmark.

**David Wilkins:** Any Indian who was determined to have more than one half Indian blood will still be considered an incompetent Indian.

**Lizzie Peabody:** Did you say incompetent?

**David Wilkins:** Yeah, incompetent.

**Lizzie Peabody:** Legally incompetent, and therefore deserving of protection by the government. It was racist and paternalistic and bad. To determine who was competent and who was not, the commissioner sent competency commissions, trooping out to size people up.

**David Wilkins:** Those competency commissions were critical. And it was completely up to the competency commission to decide who they thought had more than one half or less than one half Indian blood.

**Lizzie Peabody:** And if you're wondering how they did it, well...

**David Wilkins:** By looking at you. Right? (Laughs).

**Lizzie Peabody:** (Gasps).

**David Wilkins:** It was just ludicrous. White people in the federal government thought that they knew what an Indian was supposed to look like. Right? They were supposed to have long, black, straight hair. And they were supposed to have cheek bones and high arch noses, all these physical features that were assumed to be representative of Indigenous people. Although they're not, that was the assumption at the time.

### **Blood: Required & Proved**

The use of blood quantum by the U.S. government began as a means to an end; the means by which to identify and document an Indian and as an end to the “Indian problem.” Blood quantum was first used in the Virginia Colony in the early 1700s as a way to reduce the rights of any person with ½ or more Indian blood. Native Governance

Center provides a “Blood Quantum and Sovereignty: A Guide” (2022) that posits blood quantum practices, the fractioning and calculating of how much Indian blood a person, were rooted in the unscientific and racist eugenics. I would also include that the concept and practice was deeply engrained in the psyche of the settler-colonizers view on phenotypes. Indigenous people looked different and the observable physical differences, combined with cultural and social differences, created the story of inferiority and fear biases. Native Governance Center held a virtual event on blood quantum, “Blood Quantum and Sovereignty,” in March 2022. The event featured Megan Hill (Honoring Nations + Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development), Dr. Elizabeth Rule (American University), Dr. Jill Doerfler (University of Minnesota Duluth), and Gabe Galanda (Galanda Broadman PLLC). The following is an excerpt:

Blood quantum is not an Indigenous concept. Before colonization, Native nations used various forms of lineal descent to determine membership. Many Native nations also had ways of granting citizenship to non-kin, such as adoption and marriage. As Gabe Galanda explains, “Before contact, the great majority of our nations today self-identified as kinship societies. The fundamental tenet of kinship was reciprocity—reciprocal duty to one another, to your people, your clan, your longhouse. That was really the underpinning of how we belonged.”

Blood quantum did not play a role in determining Tribal citizenship until the Indian Reorganization Act was passed in 1934. Under this federal law, many Native nations adopted boilerplate constitutions developed by the federal government that included using blood quantum as a basis for citizenship.

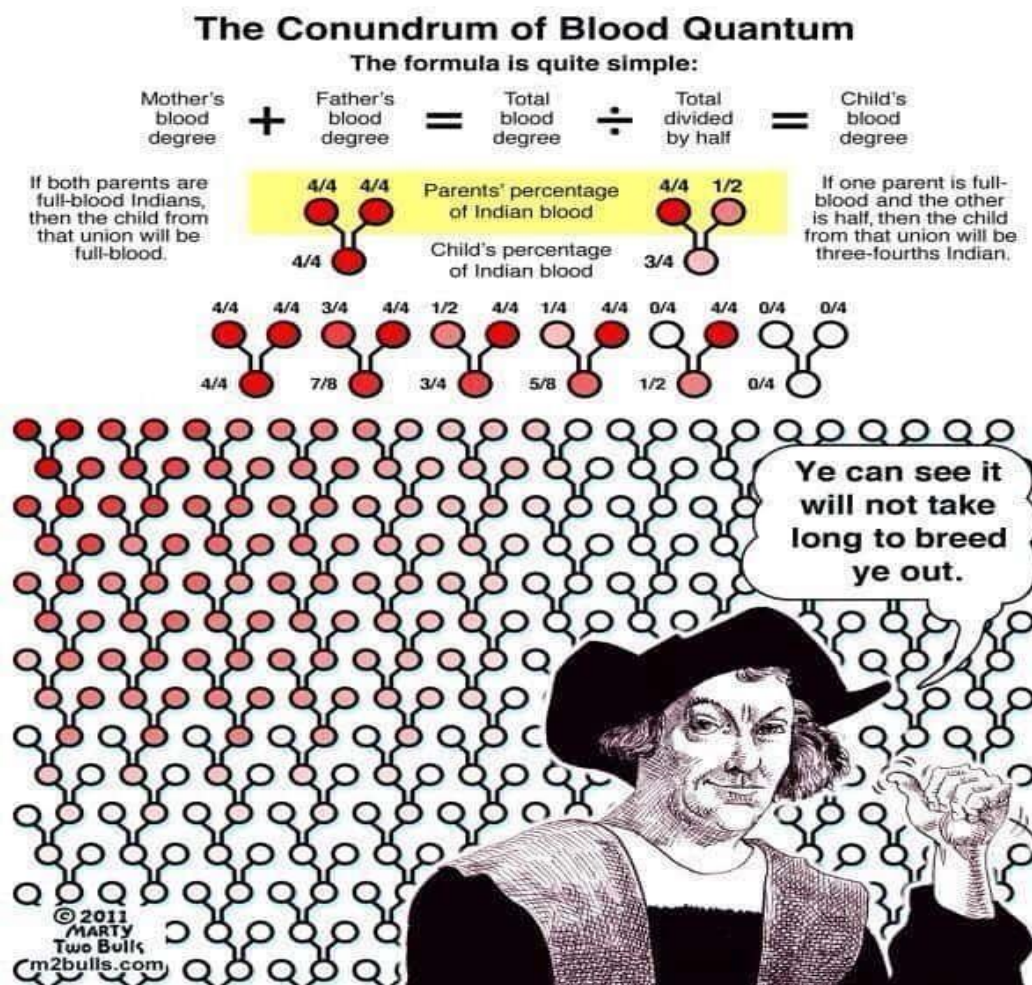
In order to be eligible for tribal enrollment, one must have a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood (CDIB) from the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) that provides membership into the group of all “real” Indians remaining on Turtle Island. Indian activist, Russell Means, says, “I was shocked to learn that the BIA had listed me as 15/32 Indian. That, I learned, was because it had ignored my great-grandmother, a full-blooded Crow...it (BIA) dismisses half of someone’s heritage with the stroke of a pen” (Armstrong, 2012). Although blood, the liquid life force within our human bodies, does not separate according to ethnicity, race, or culture, this fallacy took root and promoted erasure and oppression. Many tribes use base rolls to determine their enrollees and descendants, in addition to minimum blood quantum requirements and residency requirements.

As sovereign nations, the tribes have the ability to determine their enrollment procedures, providing the person has their CDIB card. This process begs inquiry into who has the control and power to decide who is and is not Indian. “First and foremost, the CDIB is a federal document. It serves a federal need to prove an individual’s blood quantum for purposes of several statutes and regulations. It, by itself, does not establish membership in a tribal nation, because such membership is a tribal, not federal, decision” (Spruhan, 2018, p.8). During the 1930s, many tribes were forced to codify the blood quantum of their people in formalized policies in their tribal constitutions. The goal of the BIA forcing tribes to use this genocidal measure of belonging was to bleed out the Indians and decrease the number of tribes and Indian people that the government were responsible for. Doug Kiel (2017) says that there were two paradigms the co-existed between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries regarding Native personhood. One is Indianness is determined by kinship and social relations, and the other (adopted from

settler-colonialists) “emphasized inherited blood and purity of ancestry, as well as a nascent conception of race...that came to regard Indianness as a quantifiable attribute...” (p. 80). Blood quantum, as a quantifiable and verifiable method of being a Native person (or not), spread deep roots throughout the twentieth century and into today.

Rebecca Nagle asserts that there is a difference between a person’s claim to identity and their political commitments by giving this example, “...Cherokee is a political identity in which someone either is or is not a citizen, not half or part citizen, according to the community, not according to the U.S., government” (Bruyneel, 2021, p.169). Politically and legally, this is a truth. However, how does one reconcile with the process in which tribal citizens become tribal citizens when we not only have oral stories but documented records as evidence that the base rolls used to determine most tribal citizenship were often corrupt, incorrect, and did not accurately depict who was (or was not) a “real Indian”? I also take issue with the notion of community acceptance because who makes up the community, does the community change, and what about tribal people living away from the community? Within the excellent *Re-Creating the Circle: The Renewal of American Indian Self-Determination* (2011), there is this gem: “In the Native way, everything is related... The interaction of personal and political realities affects individual relationships, community relationships, and relationships between the community and the outside political and social environments” (p. 421-422).

To base Indigenous belonging and identity on blood quantum or settler colonialist policies and laws is to forget our ancestors’ survival skills and remain complicit in Indigenous peoples’ ongoing subjugation to cultural and political eradication.

**Figure 9***Blood Quantum*

In the United States, blood quantum is just one of many examples of the way Indigenous peoples were, and are, forced to relent to a way of “counting” their own, and defining their communities in a manner foreign and in direct opposition to the traditional way of belonging to a community. Blood quantum does pepper conversations when children are involved. Recently, I was talking with a colleague, an enrolled tribal member from Washington state, who was lamenting how “unfair” blood quantum was.

She was specifically speaking about having children and that if she chose to have children with her current partner, a non-Native, then her children would not be able to be enrolled in her tribe which has a blood quantum requirement of  $\frac{1}{2}$ . But how do we stop using tools such as blood quantum and final rolls if, at the same time, we discount oral family histories if they are not documented, if there is no formal proof? Besides the fact that the documentation required was from and by the non-Native government, thus how is this a trustworthy form of evidence? What would traditional inclusion in a tribal community look like in the modern day?

Consider the case of John Ross who was the primary author of the Cherokee constitution and principal chief of the Cherokee Nation from 1828 until his death in 1866. Ross's parents were a quarter ( $\frac{1}{4}$ ) blood quantum Cherokee (mother) and Scottish (father). His father was captured by a war party and his life spared by the warriors, and he was made a member of the Cherokee Nation, marrying a Cherokee woman. The point being that even though John Ross, tireless Cherokee advocate and protector during the Andrew Jackson termination era, Trail of tears genocide, was

Seven-eighths Scottish, it is important to note that the influence of the United States government in the area of identifying Indians by degrees of native blood had not yet had its effect on our tribe. To the Cherokee mind at that time, one's identity as Cherokee depended solely on clan affiliation. Ross's mixed-blood mother was a Cherokee by definition because she and her sisters were members of the Bird Clan. Cherokee children belong to their mother's clan and retain membership for life..." (Mankiller, 1993, p. 85).

Doefler (2015) talking about Vizenor's concept of survivance, states that "a primary aspect of survivance is continuance, including the genealogical succession of families" (xxxii). John Ross' and his sister's identity story exemplifies this aspect of survivance.

### ***Keep the Blood Flowing..***

Arguments for keeping blood quantum as the method of determining what I will call "Indianship" are based in the fear that pretendians, wannabes, fakes, interlopers, and the like will infiltrate. To me, this is cognitive dissonance. If tribes determine their own rules of citizenship, and if those rules were based on community knowledge, participation, family lineage...whatever the tribe deemed the rules to be, how would non-natives get enrolled unless the tribe agreed? The other, more pressing, issue about keeping blood quantum and, in general, not being liberal with enrollment, is the fear of losing or reducing resources that are provided by the tribal governments and the federal government. John C. Mohawk (Seneca) said:

Identity is important. The colonists were very successful "radicalizing" indigenous identity such that people talk about being 25 percent of this or 40 percent of that, but one does not belong to a nation based on one's blood quantum. Belonging to an indigenous nation is a way of being in the world. Holding a membership card is not a way of being and money can't buy it.

Without multiple voices and debate, the elements of settler-colonialism that override progress to realizing the safe ownership of history and cultural survival for Indigenous peoples will continue. Without looking into the next seven generations, the tribe as a relational and reciprocal community, not a political, economic machine, will be

but a muscle memory of what was. Effective discourse and future planning cannot be accomplished through scholarly works or academics alone; I state this because the contemporary scholarly works I have researched are often incongruent with what I hear daily from real Native folks living their real lives.

To expand, I rarely hear anyone talk in terms of who is or is not enrolled, nor do I hear talk of “pretendians”—defined loosely as a person who claims Native, tribal, Indigenous heritage or affiliation but cannot provide evidence or prove their identity claim. Mary Jane McCallum, Cree Senator from Manitoba, Canada, states that

Not enough Canadians realize the harm caused by people who claim Indigenous identity without proof, McCallum said, nor how some people with legitimate ancestry are still fighting for recognition under the Indian Act.

There will always be those people that look into the gaps and ... start to use indigeneity as a source of power. (Lewis, 2023)

And, I agree, as do most people I associate with in academic and social/cultural circles, that anyone falsely claiming an identity causes harm. What makes it complex, from my point of view, is the legacy of settler-colonial eradication and termination across Turtle Island that has produced a lack of truth or transparency in base roll documentation, census records, land recordings, race records, adoption records, marriage records, and above all—the survival stories (oral and written) that don’t fit the limited avenues of “proving” ancestry. Even as I write this, we are hearing in real time, that not even “real” Indian tribal people claiming a person as Indigenous carries legitimacy when gatekeepers, under the guise of protectors, allege a “pretendian” is on the loose. According to every version of tribal traditions and protocols that I have been honored to

hear or witness, if a tribal or Indigenous family/community accepts you as one of them, that's as valid and legit as you can get. I realize this issue is deeper than a tribal community saying a person belongs. It also begs the question: Who is Indigenous? What is an Indigenous person? Interestingly, these are topics (blood quantum, enrollment, pretendians) discussed primarily between colleagues from a critical analysis and pedagogy lens. I am surrounded by tribal and Indigenous people most days, from diverse communities, backgrounds, and lived experiences where the primary topic of conversation is about all aspects of health and well-being, recognizing Native women as leaders, how to engage the youth in culture, and *how* to belong, not who belongs.

### ***Mixing Blood & Identity***

Identity is defined as “the state of fact of remaining the same one or ones, under varying aspects or conditions” (“identity”), and belonging is “acceptance as a natural member or part” (“belonging”). Working from these definitions, identity is who you are; who you feel or say you are, and belonging is apart from identity in that others must accept you into the group. Indigenous is defined as “naturally existing in a place or country rather than arriving from another place” (“indigenous”); therefore, Indigenous identity appears clean-cut to mean that if you are from a place or country, you are indigenous. This by no means explains the concept of belonging, even if one is of Indigenous identity. Within this framework it is plain to see how the “mixed-race” people who are part Indigenous, and part of another place can identify as part of a group such as a tribe, yet still not belong. We no longer have the freedom to decide for ourselves, or within a particular group, who truly belongs--legally--without the constraints of the

politics and economics of the region. I use the term region because in most settler-colonized lands, the ultimate power lies with the settler-formed government, and in the United States, there is the layering of the federal government over the state government to the county and city governments.

The very parameters of declaring a person or persons into a membership involves the capitalist vetting of said person/persons; the decision appears to go way beyond traditional kinship and community relations, due to limited resources stemming from a place of economic stability or growth; even the natural resources are viewed through the lens of economics--take fishing for example, if more members are enrolled who then have fishing rights, and the number of fish are limited, then there is fewer fish, less money for the existing members. In this situation, I have heard un-enrolled members of communities express the desire to belong, regardless of if they received per capita or fishing/hunting rights; and would even forfeit such inherent and acquired rights to be a bona fide member.

Blood quantum practices by the U.S. government are an interesting choice since the Federalists rejected the concept of monarchies, *based on blood relationships*, yet imposed this on the Indigenous peoples as a means of riddance. Turning the tables on what they, themselves, despised because there was no room for social climbing without being born into the right bloodline, and then of all the audacity (and caucacity, sorry, I had to use this here) to use blood as a measure of Indianness to prevent social mobility – brilliant move for the white man. And shameful.

With the wide-reaching use of the blood quantum method of determining U.S., federal tribal membership, the Indigenous peoples of North America will eventually run

out of Indian blood. These phenomena also leave a very narrow margin for the multiracial, mixed-race generations to claim a specific tribal identity or belong. Proof of identity, for Indigenous peoples, is not simply a by-product of colonization, but is a promotion of continued colonization, an acquiescence to continual oppression and undermining of true sovereignty. Michelle R. Montgomery (2012) in "Identity Politics: the Mixed-Race American Indian Experience," states:

Similar to historical government policies and laws that determined the (monoracial)'one-drop' rule for blacks, current policies rely on blood quantum for federal tribal recognition or tribal enrollment...blood quantum is used as a device to categorize people based on the power structures of 'whiteness,' ....Tribal sovereignty does not shield a race group, above all mixed-race American Indians, from the social and political structures of the legacy of white supremacy. (p.1-2)

How can indigenous people combat such a legacy when living within the modern world that has been created, formed, and guarded by white supremacy, and ultimately by a social value system that not only puts white at the top but white with money as the tip of the vertical world? The promise of true sovereignty and freedom for Indigenous peoples to continue their cultural and traditional ways of life, is the promise of staying horizontal and becoming stamped into the earth, fossilizing into the relics the settler colonizers originally desired. "Blood quantum often symbolizes belonging without any participation requirement" (McKay, 2021, p.13) meaning that just because someone has the required blood quantum to be enrolled in a tribe doesn't mean they practice, participate, or hold tribal traditions or values. Blood quantum is often viewed as the gauge to being a "real"

Indian, and when someone talks about being full-blood or their relative is full-blood it is simultaneously a statement, an adjective, and a social placement.

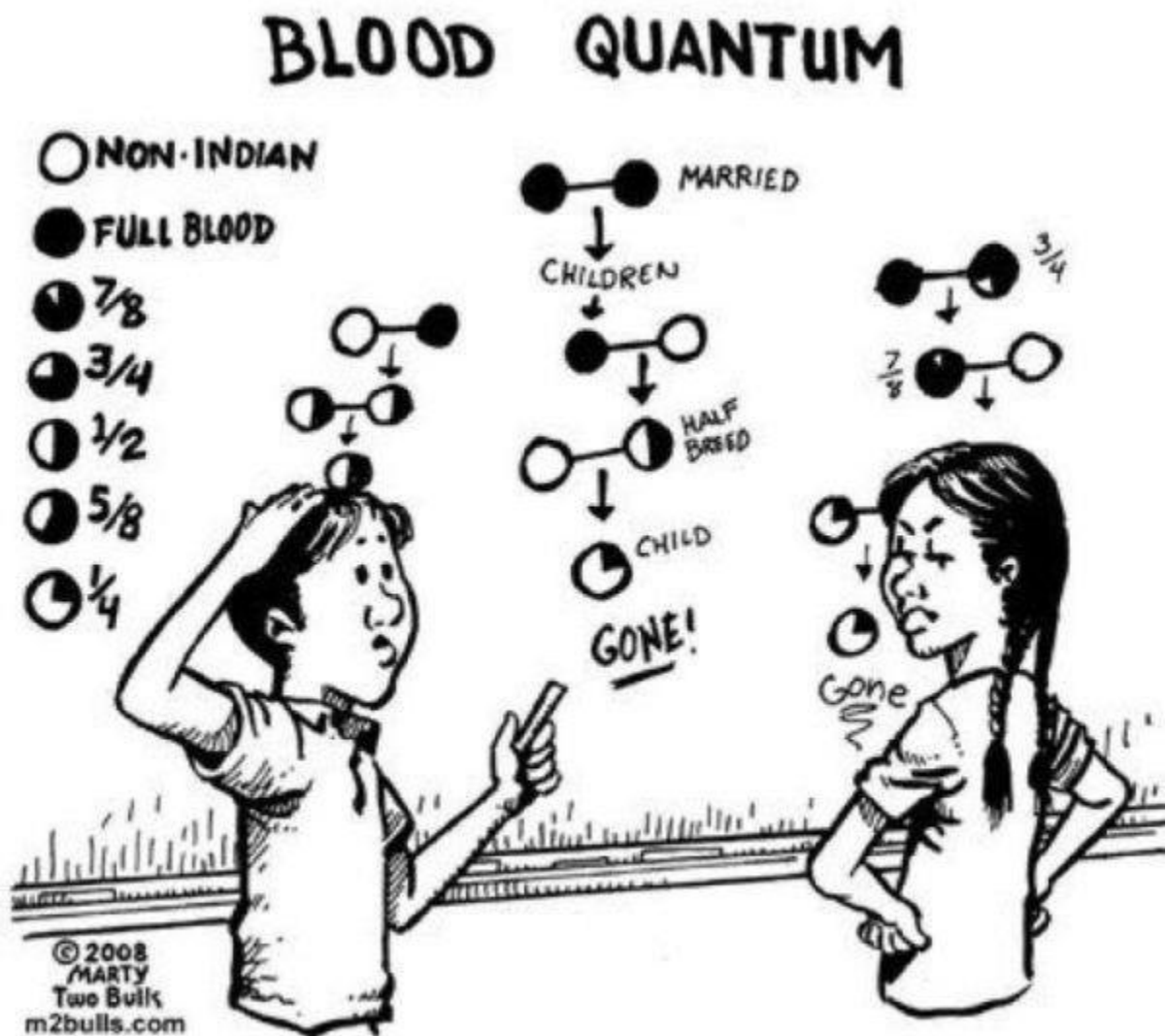
Authenticity policing indicates the power to challenge another's belonging or tentative inclusion within a group. Birthed in colonizing oppression, European acts of othering, settler colonialism, and federal Indian policy, the "real Indian" trope is a social fact for American Indians. That is, there is a collective belief that authentic indigeneity exists—one that transcends and exerts external constraint over individual understandings. Thus, indigeneity claims commonly encounter resistance in the United States. (McKay, 2021, p. 13)

The idea that there is a singular, authentic, legitimate, valid way of being Indigenous is irrational and denies the cosmology that Indigeneity extends from. It's similar to when folks want to either appear highly intelligent (without the actual knowledge necessary) or in fact believe themselves to be highly intelligent (and thus others are viewed as less than) and they use an assortment of fancy or big words/terms that in reality are smoke and mirrors and what I call word salad, that is to say there is little substance to the idea or message. But these ideas tend to burrow into the general population's mind, and therein lies the greatest problem for how does one revolt against, or change a thing that isn't true to begin with? McKay (2021) says that:

Self-identified people do not automatically gain acceptance as American Indians. Contemporary authenticity criteria vary greatly by tribe, social organization, and regional location. People may hold adequate markers within one or more categories but not within all. Possessing phenotypical authenticity does not indicate cultural capacity or tribal membership. Cultural standing does not

depend on phenotype or belonging to a federally recognized tribe. Tribal citizenship is not equivalent to holding traditional knowledge, community belonging, or racial identifiability. (p.18)

To add a little (darkish) Indian humor and a visual interpretation of what blood quantum practices are doing to tribes, families, and the future (Marty Two Bulls, 2008):



Hey wait a minute, we're disappearing!

**Collaborators: Voices from the Ground****Impromptu talking circle**

An impromptu talking circle happened one afternoon with a group of self-identified Native American students: 3 tribally enrolled, 1 descendant with paperwork from their tribe, and 3 descendants without documentation (all agreed to me taking notes on their responses and wanted me to include in my doctoral research because, as one student said, “We never get a say, and we are the ones living it.”

The question that prompted a more than two-hour discourse was: *What constituted a “real” or “authentic” Native American?*

I listened as they each shared ideas, then found they all believed a similar thing. I asked if they could collectively come up with a list, numbered according to priority or most important element of being a “real” or “authentic” Native person, and this is what they came up with:

1. community and cultural involvement and knowledge, but the tribal community involvement did not need to be their own tribe but where they lived and worked.
2. cultural knowledge of one’s own tribal history, practices and traditions was secondary but necessary.

When questioned about how this cultural knowledge was to be gained if one didn’t live near their ancestral lands or tribe, the response was: “no excuse in today’s world because of the internet.” They all agreed that accessing information, re-connecting with family and tribe, and having relationships could be done from afar; that’s the reality today— many Natives “don’t live on their own reservation, if they have

one.” The age range of the talking circle was between 23–29 years old and all identify as either growing up away from their tribes or near reservations that were not their own.

What I found fascinating is that nobody mentioned enrollment, blood quantum, or living on one’s homelands/reservation; instead, the focus of the two criteria were community and culture, belonging and participating, and tribal/cultural knowledge. This appears to be in opposition to McKay’s (2021) findings exploring how indigeneity claims encounter opposition at interpersonal and group levels and the consequences of authenticity policing. “I ask two guiding questions: What authenticity markers hold the most value for American Indians? How do American Indians justify authenticity policing?” (p.12) The concluding findings, per McKay, were:

Even participants with strong cultural and political belonging desire to be identified as racially Indian because they recognize authenticity policing occurs on multiple levels—racial, cultural, and legal. Any shared discriminatory beliefs and common stereotypes that American Indians hold against and/or about one another originate in the racist discourse of the colonial conquest and domination. Policing these authenticity boundaries presents great challenges for indigenous communities. What authenticity markers hold the most value for American Indians? My findings show that tribal communities and indigenous people have internalized and continue to reify federally defined criteria for authentic indigeneity. That is, documented belonging in the form of Indian cards and high blood quanta bear substantive and significant importance. How do American Indians justify authenticity policing? American Indians have accepted and

incorporated the definitions and objects used against them within the embodiment of indigeneity. (p.23)

I realize this is comparing a two-hour conversation with a fully engaged research project, but I find value in the different responses, or findings. I predict that my role (as teacher) and relationship (as mentor) with the collaborators of the impromptu talking circle plus the informal, organic shape of the discourse created an environment where the concepts of blood quantum, phenotypical presentation, and internalized settler-colonial ways of identifying an authentic Indian were not forgotten but also not acknowledged, with the purpose of not giving space or power to these tools of oppression. These are integral topics that the Native Pathways Program (NPP) explores and critically examines. One only knows what they know.

### **Informal Interview**

During an informal interview, collaborator Ash and I talked about growing up knowing you are Indigenous but not enrolled with any of your ancestral tribes; of being mixed-blood—Native, Mexicana, White-- and not growing up on a reservation, and the weirdness with blood quantum percentages, especially when “the math don’t math.”

**Ash** shared the following:

Sometimes I feel guilty because of my low blood quantum and not growing up on the reservation but receiving scholarships at college for being Native. My mom told me not to say I was Indian or Makah when I was growing up so that I wouldn’t get bullied at school. I remember in third grade we were painting self-portraits and the teacher mixed peach paint for all the students except for me she

mixed green for my “olive skin.” I didn’t begin to actively identify as Native until college.

I didn’t know what “enrollment” was and remember hearing my Mom on the telephone saying, “We need to get Ashley adopted.” I cried because I thought she wanted to adopt me out because I was a bad child. I finally found out that I wasn’t “enrolled” in high school. My Mom and sister both had “cards” and they used them to get into National Parks but I didn’t have one. I was born off the reservation because my (white) Dad was in the military, so I had to basically apply and market myself to the tribe so they could vote on me.

The process was to identify and prove my family tree, provide a parent(s) enrollment number (my Mom said no), then campaign (flyers and t-shirts with me, my family information, etc.) on the reservation to get people to, I don’t know, remember me and my family, I guess. Tribal Council then had to vote. I could not attend the voting meetings because on enrollment tribal members can attend and vote. Days after the vote, I was told that everyone who was up for an adoption vote that year was adopted into the tribe. This only happened a few years ago, and I was so excited to have tangible proof (my Discovery Pass for National Parks, Enrollment card, and CDIB card) but also upset that it is necessary to have this kind of proof.

**Closing Reflections**

The history of blood quantum and the collaborator stories illustrate the burden of identity politics for many Indigenous Peoples, and demonstrate the lasting impacts on mind, body, heart, and spirit of the settler-colonial (genocide) project in Turtle Island. The differentiation between social/cultural and political Indigenous identity becomes clearer as the stories intersect with these themes and concepts. By grasping the systematic governmental oversight in the process of exercising tribal sovereignty, and even being recognized as a tribe in the first place, the framework for why blood quantum, the fractioning of humans, is under current investigation becomes apparent. Having to prove who you are transcends enrolled and unenrolled people, as this poem by Sasha LaPointe (2022) expresses:

***Pony***

I carried a jar  
big and glass  
fragile in my hands  
asking strangers  
for money  
  
along the Nooksack  
  
I was barefoot I was ten  
  
I was saving  
to buy a pony

because the salmonberries

weren't good enough

the wool blankets

weren't good enough

for me to be a real

Indian like the ones

in the movies

I was going to need

to buy a pony

and paint it

and ride off to war

on it or become part of

it like the Girl Who Loved Wild Horses

or whatever

I wasn't really sure

what I would do with it

just that it wasn't

a canoe

or a longhouse

it was something

living something

Indian

**CHAPTER FIVE | RECOGNITION REALITIES*****Half is still quite a bit of Breed***

White people are quick to point out Squinty's fair complexion; they say, "After all, you're only half Indian." On the rez, his cousins call him, "City Boy" and throw rocks. Yet, there's never been a point in his early life when he wasn't surrounded by Indians. There used to be a cafe in Inchelium called *Steem as Spaoos*, which translates in English as, "What is in your heart?" Wrapped within this simple phrase is the entire philosophy of the Sinixt Nation. The question asks, are you friend or foe? Do you live according to the original instructions (the laws of Nature), or are you bound by the arbitrary and ambiguous laws of Man? Do you carry within you a sense of compassion, or are you a sociopath? Are you a Human Being, or are you playing at being human? Squinty is still finding his heart, so their taunts and rocks sting him to his core. The idea of blood quantum baffles his mad teenage mind. "When I'm around White people, I'm not Indian enough and when I'm around Indians, I'm too White." He despises his self-loathing as a sign of his own weakness in the face of adversity, which only fuels him further into shame. He hasn't learned that

not every Indian lives according to the laws of Nature and not every White person lives according to the laws of Man, so it is necessary to ask, "What is in your heart?" (Dickerson, 2018)

Let's begin this chapter with the reality of recognition; what it means to be recognized by others to the point where you no longer recognize yourself, or your reality is unrecognized by others, rendering you visibly disappearing. The poetic story that opens this chapter frames the contradictions and landscapes Indigenous people navigate through in the modern world. The formation of identity and the protection of identity when analyzed through a lens of identity politics brings me into a circle of recognition. The reality is that as we journey through time and space, we recognize ourselves, thus often become ourselves through the eyes, stories, and spirit of others. These stories of ourselves are validated through the reality of others. Sachs (2011) talks about a process called "parallel identification" and how, in addition to legacies of genocide, assimilation projects, and intergeneration trauma from deep colonial wounds, it is also necessary to remember that the:

majority of native people today are of mixed blood descent. In addition, tribal members are literally dual citizens of the United States and their nation period therefore, for Indian people, there are multiple levels of relationships in the two worlds that need to be acknowledged and validated. For healing to occur, models are needed that allow all people to self-identify without having to diminish or deny any part of themselves. All people need to walk in balance and be supported and

fairly witnessed as whole, not splintered, human beings. Much of cultural identification occurs through a process of social learning. (p.383)

I can hear the voices of dissent. There is often chatter—that tense, rushed kind of talk when the topic of mixed anything comes up with Native folks. I am curious if this reaction is grounded in shame of recognizing that relationships with the settlers were a reality, or if unlike other marginalized groups, Natives have actively resisted assimilation so to recognize mixed-blood is an admission of assimilating? By looking at the complexities and challenges of identity politics from personal/familial *and* tribal points of view, and from the eradication, termination, and relocation policies enacted upon all Indigenous Americans, the responses will bend toward the restorative and not extractive.

Simpson (2017) beautifully details why internal reciprocal recognition is vital to Indigenous Peoples:

...recognition for us is about presence, about profound listening and about recognizing and affirming the light in each other as a mechanism for nurturing and strengthening internal relationships to our Nishnaabeg worlds. It is core it is a core part of our political systems because they are rooted in our bodies and our bodies are not just informed but by created and maintained by relationships of deep reciprocity. Our bodies exist only in relation to indigenous complex, nonlinear constructions of time, space, and place that are continually rebirthed through the practice and often coded recognition of obligations and responsibilities within a nest of diversity, freedom, consent, non-interference, and a generated, proportional, emergent reciprocity. (p. 181)

It is a practicing of survivance to listen and recognize other's stories, and stories hold multiple realities at the same time. In the Introduction of *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, Indigenous storywork is described as exemplifying Indigenous methodology. "Acutely aware of the way in which research as a tool of colonization has scripted our stories with encryptions of hegemonic oppression, Indigenous storywork seeks to rectify the damage and claim our ability to story-talk, story-listen, story-learn and story-teach" (Archibald et al, 2019, p 7). This resonates deeply as this chapter explores collaborator's stories of recognition and lived realities.

The intersection of identities aligns with traditional knowledge from the perspective of Indigenous holistic and interconnected practices of being in relationship with everything in their surroundings. Researching Indigenous identity and identity politics, cognizance of multiple identities is the foundation of analyzing the systems that surround Indigenous recognition. Jodi Byrd (2020) in examining Indigeneity and queerness through an identity and recognition lens, states:

... I might first offer some provisional thoughts on how to hold the Indigenous and queer together and bind them through the concept of ground, not as identitarian categories to be revitalized and performed within ethnographic and linguistic records of colonial archives or as decolonially affirmative sexualities, but as a possible way to hold the simultaneous nothing and everything — and I want to add the spatiality of nowhere and everywhere to Belcourt's simultaneity — that the conjunction of Indigenous with queer might provide as a critical stance for eschewing recognition altogether. (p.106)

What I pull as a thread of commonality from this work is the critical look at the way historical documents, stories, and colonial records are used in contemporary times to, once again, set the boundaries and parameters of identity and recognition of all aspects of Indigenous identity. Byrd (2020) also references the brilliant poet, Billy-Ray Belcourt, and I am compelled to share this beauty:

***Autofiction***

How we exist in the world  
depends on how we describe it.  
Have I always been in the world?  
No, I've been autumn in the middle of August.  
I've been the wind as well as the tamarack tree  
seconds after its final needles drop.  
Don't tell anyone, but I'm happiest  
when my life feels like autofiction.  
In Alberta, the twentieth century never ended.  
We are all subjects of the twentieth century,  
I say to a man I just met on the internet.  
It sounds like a riddle for which the answer is the body.  
Every winter, I take pictures of the snow  
because the snow reminds me  
of my impermanence. Mostly, I want to be undone  
without being ruined. An NDN truth?  
The present is as beautiful as it is brutal. (Belcourt, 2022)

**Collaborator Sharing: Talking Circle braided into Semi-Formal Interview**

This talking circle that turned into a semi-formal interview began in late summer 2021. I provided food and beverages, and activities for those who brought children. Three years later, I am still in strong relationship with every collaborator. Three have since had their first child, and all have gone on to work professionally in higher education, for their tribes, and in non-profit Indigenous owned and focused organizations.

***Collaborators***

**W. B.**, age 29, male, enrolled Muckleshoot at age 22, Muckleshoot and Nooksack. Claims white on federal census because of mom but doesn't identify as white socially or culturally—identifies as "Indian" "Native" maybe "American Indian." He was enrolled in the Nooksack Tribe originally and in his early 20s switched his enrollment to the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe where he grew up. He Graduated high school then attended community college "on and off", earned AA in 2018, graduated NPP/Evergreen in 2020 with BA; joined the MPA tribal governance master's degree in 2022 and is currently doing doctoral work at the wananga. He said, in 2020 his goal was to earn a PhD and focus his work on tribal history, policy, and public leadership.

**K. G.**, age 23, female, Latina, "Ecuadorian/Mexican, my great, great, great grandparent was Spanish and fought in the wars, hence the surname Gomez," and we are Indigenous from "the mountains." She participated in Running Start during high school, then attended a local community college earning her 2-year AA degree and graduated from Evergreen in 2020 with a BA degree. She is bilingual (English/Spanish) and hopes to return to school to become a math teacher or an accountant.

**A. V.**, 29, female, personally identifies as “Indigena Mestiza and politically Nisqually.” She is Mexican, Puerto Rican, Hawaiian, and Native; identifies as “Indigenous” or “Native.” Her daughters were present, per her request and approval, aged 16 and 14 and both identify as female, “Mexican and Native.” Her mom is enrolled Nisqually but she, and her children, are descendants because they don’t have enough blood quantum. She dropped out of high school and earned her GED at age 17. She had her first child at age 13, second at 15, and third at 21. She started NWIC in 2011 and graduated with the 2-year AA degree then went to a big university for two quarters and dropped out, saying “she was the only Native in a class led by a Native faculty, but the class was teaching non-natives about Natives.” She graduated with a BA degree in 2020 from NPP and Evergreen. She is bilingual (English/Spanish) and wants to pursue her master’s in education and focus on Indigenous healing through education.

Two other collaborators joined part of the talking circle above but also met with me on two other occasions (Summer 2021, Winter 2021, Spring 2022).

**K.P.**, age 26, male, identifies as Nez Perce and Yakama (socially) and a Nez-Perce and Yakama descendant (professionally) “because I am not federally enrolled for political reasons, blood quantum, so I use ‘socially’ to clarify my identity.

**V.M.**, age 28, female, identifies as “a white-passing Latinx with Indigenous roots in Nicaragua.” For her there is no difference between social and professional identity because there is no “enrollment” to be Indigenous Latinx. Her Mom is Italian and Irish, (family immigrated in the 1800s) and her dad is Panamanian, Dominican Republican, and Nicaraguan (born in Nicaragua).

*Does identifying as Indigneous inpact you in higher education?*

**W. B.:**

At community college I was tokenized at graduation because I fought to wear my cedar grad cap and my tribe, Muckleshoot, fought for my right to wear it—the college marketing took a photo and put it on social media and still use it years later to show they represent and support Indigenous students.

Identifying as Native was a positive thing being within the Native Pathways Program, and with their support, I could navigate issues I encountered from the college in general. One issue was through financial aid. They wouldn't accept, I am not kidding, my tribal scholarship because the college's financial aid runs fall to summer and my tribe's is summer to fall; the financial aid employees were ignorant and disrespectful until my tribe threatened to not fund tribal students at the college anymore, and the administration from NPP explained repeatedly the tribal scholarship process to the financial aid office.

**A.V.:**

I'm only talking about higher education, because pre that is too traumatic. At Northwest Indian College on the Nisqually reservation, the campus was on my home reservation which was great for place-based learning, but I couldn't be my full identity because it is definitely frowned upon to claim Mexican. Also, it could be uncomfortable because of the enrolled vs. unenrolled students. At Evergreen, the Native Pathways Program was home away from home, and the faculty were mentors and role-models. We are family.

**K.G.:**

Before college, in school, I was always asked by teachers where Ecuador was and often asked to speak on behalf of anyone from Central or South America. At Evergreen, the Latinx population was diverse, with Latinx students with ancestry and family from all over Latin America. I felt comfortable with my identity and bilingualness because I was in a program called “El Camino.” Outside of my program and the Native Pathways Program, it was pretty much just white faculty and students.

We talked about their future goals and plans, as well as the role identity plays in their choices. They all felt confident and strong in how they identified. The place of tension, anger, and exhaustion was determined to be when they were “surrounded by white dominant culture” because of the following given reasons:

- having to explain Indigeneity or tribes
- being overlooked or ignored
- being called aggressive in their manner of speaking (the two women only)
- hearing and dealing with ignorant and racism comments

I can especially relate with being called “aggressive” as a brown woman who is a “straight-shooter” (translates to direct communicator), has a voice that rises and falls, hands that share in the verbal process of communicating, and defies the unspoken rules of engagement: moderated voice, limited facial or body expression, and defer to others in the room that outrank you (in social or professional capital). **A.V.** and **K.G.**, although half my age, present and communicate in similar ways. I immediately want to protect

them from all the heartache that the professional world, and world at large, will give them. Education, mentorship, and advocacy are the concrete and tangible things I and other Indigenous educators and leaders can do for our younger generation.

I was fascinated by the social and professional designations when identifying; and so our conversation began with me acknowledging how it is very different, depending on who we are identifying to, and in what context. Both **K.P.** and **V.M.** understood identity politics to be a way to identify a group of people who share culture, ways of life, customs, and ethnicity or even race typically for the purpose of fighting for their (that group's) rights.

We began by each telling me whatever they wanted as way of further introduction, knowing that I was conducting research on the topic of identity politics and Indigeneity in higher education.

**K.P.:**

Socially enrollment doesn't matter because identity is a complex system that is different between all federally enrolled tribes as it is their sovereign right to determine membership. Enrollment criteria is problematic because Indigeneity is not limited or dependent upon tribal enrollment. The political reality of tribal enrollment can be weaponized. I don't claim my dad or my white ancestry because my Mom will say "My husband is White but Native," and that means he was accepted and practiced the ways --the Native ways--and he was buried in a tribal cemetery. My mom is enrolled in Nez Perce and according to blood

quantum, I cannot be enrolled because I must have 25% only Nez Perce blood. I am 7/32, which means I am 1/32 under 25%, and I can't use my Yakama blood because Yakama also has a blood quantum of 25% --Yakama only blood. My kids won't be enrolled either because of who I fell in love with.

I was homeschooled until high school then earned my high school diploma at a Technical College, where I studied construction. In the summer of 2016, I went to the Northwest Indian College on the Nisqually reservation because I wasn't happy with my career choice of construction. I saw online on an Indian Country subreddit that there was a tribal college with Indigenous faculty located near where I lived. I was just coming out of a very heavy religion and religious practices and was missing my cultural connections (the religion was anti-Indian, and I had to essentially ignore my core identity). I transferred to the Evergreen State College for the Native Pathways Program and graduated with a bachelor's degree in 2019. I went on to do the Master of Public Administration (MPA) in the Tribal Governance cohort and graduated in 2022. Oh yeah, I also earned a Master Certificate in Digital Humanities from Georgetown University.

**V.M.:**

I got my high school diploma and began Community College at the age of 18. Originally, I was interested in psychology but dropped out after the first semester because of personal reasons. A couple years later. I tried again at another Community College and dropped out again. In the fall of 2016, I moved halfway across the country to the Pacific Northwest and began at the Evergreen State

College. The first program I took was with Indigenous faculty and it was called “Thinking in Indian.” It was a program for an entire year and changed how I viewed college, and my place in college. The next year I took another Indigenous program called “Survival of Indigenous Art” and joined the Native Pathways Program in 2018, graduating in 2020 with a BA degree, emphasis areas of Native American & Indigenous Studies and Creative Writing. I applied and was accepted into the Master of Public Administration/Tribal Governance cohort but withdrew my application to focus on work and figuring out what I really want to be and do.

I asked the following, then listened and recorded (written, not audio) as they conversed. *Does identifying as Indigenous affect/impact your experiences in higher education?*

**K.P.:**

In a history class at the Technical College, I had a friendly, older White professor who took a “special interest” in me (because I was Native) and he had a connection between my identity as a Native person and the context of class we were studying Lewis and Clark. This experience made me feel valued not tokenized; I felt like my perspective was being listened to.

Growing up on an urban reservation, Puyallup, and in a mixed household, I felt more urban or Pan- Indian, and this experience gave me the ability to make connections with any tribal people. I could see distinctions between tribes wherever I was, so it was not a culture shock to be around a large group of Natives, but I didn't find what I was searching for, or feel at home when I was at a

tribal college. Saying that, however, it wasn't "the norm to be surrounded and learning with all other Indians." As far as Indigenous identity in the university or college, I think there is an increased degree of acknowledgement of Indigenous peoples and students externally, but there's also a decreased acknowledgement internally because we're still marginalized at an institutional level. Many events and public displays leave out the Native perspective; and Leadership only addresses certain segments of the Natives and sees Natives as a monolithic group. We are often ignored in matters of curriculum or institutional change. Much of the work that is done by our Native and Indigenous students, faculty or staff is co-opted by the college. It feels like we are "showpieces" and that is not working to support Indigenous education or Indigenous student success like they tell the outside world is our mission, or part of our strategic plan. At Evergreen, I've noticed that identity politics is at play because I've witnessed how the institution has operated inconsistently with different "groups." The leadership clearly (to us) has implicit biases connected to Native and Indigenous Peoples, which is reflected in how the resources are not equitably used or given across campus. We do more with less.

**V.M.:**

At Evergreen my identity is malleable to the environment. I did not grow up in a cultural background and being at Evergreen, in particular in the Native Pathways Program, has been more affirming of my Indigeneity than any other institution. This is because of the programs and the faculty who make it a priority to be inclusive of all Indigenous students, and all students in general but keeping the

program focused on Indigeneity. Indigenous identity politics, I feel, were at play when I was on the Student Activities Board for the whole college student body and involved in the Student Governance Council of NPP. You had to be careful of when and how you were using your voice because it doesn't interact with the world at large; people get defensive or act like you are asking for special treatment if you bring up an issue that is tied to being an Indigenous student, or in a Native group. As an Indigenous person, when I was interviewed for the Student Activities Board for the position as a student representative, I became the only Indigenous student on the Board, and I did feel like they listened to me when I was speaking. There were unnecessary roadblocks and multiple meetings with no resolution when as students identifying as Native or Indigenous, we tried to host cultural events. It was an attitude like we didn't deserve to exist, and there was a desire to homogenize all the Native and Indigenous students to do the same thing, and share resources, even if we were two different groups—one for governance and one for culture/social justice. Working with people outside of the Native Pathways Program at the college always felt very paternalistic.

There was a lack of accountability with other divisions too-- advisers and others did not show up and there was a lack of communication and collaboration that was blamed on the Indigenous students and their "attitudes." These were professional staff people working at the college saying that we (our Native student governance group) had "attitudes" because we called out their unresponsiveness and no-shows.

*I asked how the situation of being gaslit made her feel?*

**V.M.:** “Frustrated, so frustrated. And powerless because the workers were straight-up lying and not being accountable.”

**K.P.:** “It was par for the course, you know. Even though it is to be expected because that is typically how things go—we Natives get blamed, it still sucks each and every time it happens. Especially in this case where one of the perpetrators (workers) identifies as Native yet gave our students the most challenges and obstacles.”

*I asked if they thought Native/Indigenous students encountered this type of discrimination or these types of say, personnel, challenges?*

**K.P.:** “At our college, I’d say from my experience that Native students get it worse, but all marginalized students get less resources, less help, less respect.”

**A.V.:** Joined this conversation saying: “I was in Student Governance for a year, and you know how I talk loud and with my hands, well, it was like they were scared or something when I was explaining the events we wanted to put on. I felt like nobody listened because they didn’t like how I talk, and white people are quieter and slower when they talk...I don’t know, but it is horrible and happens all the time, not just in college.”

I told **A.V.** that I 100% related to realizing people (and yes, primarily White professionals) either stopped listening to me, or got defensive simply because my voice and animated hand-talk made them presumably uncomfortable. **K.P.** laughed because as he relayed: “I talk loud and with my hands and feel like people always listen to me.”

**A.V. and V.M.:** Both, in different words, agreed that this was because K.P. is a man, even if he is a Native man. And he agreed.

The next question: *What's most important? Indigenous faculty, content/curriculum, or pedagogy (the methodology and method of the teaching)?*

*Indigenous faculty* –**V.M.** says Indigenous faculty can be “brainwashed and westernized.” **W.B.** says “Indigenous faculty are important because I grew up on a reservation and had to navigate through a western world because my mom is white. I grew up with my white family, so it's important to have Indigenous faculty even Pan-Indianism is better than none.

*Indigenous content/curriculum* –**V.M.** says, “it can be taught the wrong way, so it really depends on the faculty and their competence and knowledge.”

*Indigenous pedagogy* - **V.M.** says, “This is the most important; the way one teaches expresses values and Indigenous values being expressed through the curriculum, and how it's taught, is the most important for students.”

**K.P.**, after taking notes, states:

All three of these things matter significantly and are not mutually exclusive. Non-Indigenous faculty can implement an Indigenous curriculum and participate as an ally in Indigenous communities; therefore, can facilitate positive learning.

Students with Indigenous faculty can have a shared identity that can be helpful to their success in school. Indigenous faculty can apply an Indigenous framework to decipher and learn western curriculum if there's content missing. But...I do think that content always matters--about or from Indigenous peoples. Ideally, an Indigenized pedagogy is most important but also most unlikely in higher education, predominately western mainstream institutions. So it's most important

and effective for us to have Indigenous faculty at least teaching from their individual framework and Indigenous framework; however, this implies that you must have only Indigenous faculty to teach Indigenous content, but if you use Indigenous pedagogy it's problematic because it's exclusionary and not practical or realistic throughout higher education.

**K.P.** and **V.M.** talked about the way that Indigenous students can exercise power in institutions of higher education. They talked about the following practices:

- Creating community through clubs,
- Cohort learning programs
- Collective land acknowledgments
- Commissioned Native artists for institutional art
- Write for school newspapers
- Lobby at the legislature
- Push for Institutional leaders to include Natives in their planning
- Develop and put on community events that are welcoming to everyone; and
- Students need to stay visible and make their needs known.

The rest of the time was informal talking circle style information gathering about overall concepts and thoughts and feelings when identifying as Indigenous. The following are key points discussed:

- Identifying as Indigenous is a plus personally because you can feel accepted and supported by connecting with other Indigenous people.

- Identifying as Indigenous poses challenges institutionally because of institutional racism. **V.M.** talked about attending a work retreat where the college marketing people came to present, and no one acknowledged the Native or Indigenous worldview or perspective when talking about marketing strategies and the future. The message was they wanted to “move towards younger, serious scholars that emphasize STEM.” **K.P.** talked about a “lack of validation because Indigenous identity is not valued as a whole and so cultural and social capital decreases, and it can lead to erasure. Within institutions you have to recognize you have an opinion different from the mainstream, but it can be tokenized by identifying with the targeted group. And it can make it difficult to get things done or to acquire financial resources.”
- Identifying as Indigenous and tribal enrollment. In higher education institutions, being an enrolled tribal member should be a factor, but not the only one determining who is (or is not) Native American or Alaskan Native. **K.P.** states, “It should not matter, enrollment, because the mentors and those I have learned the most from about how to be or live as an Indian are non-enrolled people. They are still Indigenous; they are still Indian, but they are not enrolled in their tribes. Being enrolled is about how it interfaces with the rest of the world. It's a verification, an evaluation, and it presents triangulation. Enrollment is a method and has more value often for non-Natives. **V.M.** feels like the conversation around tribal enrollment is sometimes an active and intentional campaign against a person learning their own history (if they are not enrolled).

We discussed the overarching values shared between Indigenous cultures as oppressed groups and as marginalized groups—values such as Relationality and Reciprocity, Elder wisdom, protocols in public spaces as a representative of your people (in the general sense), and knowledge of history. *Within higher education, I inquired, what are those shared generalized values that can be implemented and practiced, or that build community?* The collective responses included: “shared experience through an oppressed and marginalized positionality, honesty, accountability, cultural voice and significance, collectivism, and community.”

At another point in time, we reconvened, and I explained William Cross’ Nigrescence theory (1971) and his re-evaluated theory of 1991 that has broadly been interpreted as the developmental process, or stages, of becoming Black. I was interested from the perspective of understanding how the realization and acceptance (or not) of a personal Indigenous identity could be examined by utilizing Cross’ four stages of process: Encounter, Immersion-Emersion, Internalization, Internalization-Commitment (Ritchey, 2014). Based on Cross, I narrowed the descriptions of the stages, adding Indigenous, and defined the stages as follows: *Encounter* as an event or time that you understand yourself through the lens of your Indigenous identity/self; *Immersion-Emersion* as the time you begin to research your Indigenous history, seek out your culture, find where people are Indigenous, or assimilate into mainstream culture; *Internalization* is the time you move away from how others perceive you and embrace yourself, as you identify; and *Internalization-Commitment* is the confidence and clarity in your identity and the future as an Indigenous person.

**Considering the *Encounter* stage:****K.P.:**

The first time I questioned being Native (I always understood myself to be Native) was around age twelve, after my dad passed and my mom and I became Jehovah's Witness. A (White) member asked my mom how much Indian she was and then asked me, "How much Indian do you think you are?" I said, "I don't know, half." The member told me, "You can't be half. Maybe you are a quarter." That's when I realized that other people were identifying me and judging me, and I didn't have a say in it.

**V.M.:**

When I was seven and in second grade, my sister came to teach art to my class. She is fourteen years older than me and very dark-skinned because both her parents were Panamanian (we have the same Dad). I'd been attending a Latinx preschool and daycare before grade school, so I had never identified or thought of myself as White. I was really excited and told everyone in my class: "That's my sister." And the other kids said she wasn't my sister (they thought I was lying) because they said, "You don't look like her; you don't have her skin."

Both **V.M.** and **K.P.** acknowledge each other's stories and how they both didn't acknowledge, or even consider, that they were "half-White," and they agreed that they didn't feel "guilt or confusion about rejecting their whiteness." It wasn't as if they thought being White was "bad" or "good"; they just didn't think to separate their identities.

***Immersion/Emersion Intersects with Internalization stage:*****V.M.:**

I chose to identify as Latinx because I grew up predominantly in California. When we moved to Michigan, I was viewed by my peers (in high school) as white because of the color of my skin and I didn't speak Spanish. I would like to be visibly brown-skinned because it fits into how I see myself, as a Latina and Indigenous person. I acknowledge there is some privilege and social capital being light-skinned, but I would rather have the reverse social capital—the cred with my community, so to speak. When I was homeless in Michigan, my white skin color didn't help foster relationships with my peers, who were majority Black. I felt like an outcast, and it didn't matter if I was Latina or Indigenous because the Spanish speaking Latinas were given the cultural and social clout. Nobody knew where Nicaragua or Panama was anyway. I'd say that because of my light skin, I haven't gained advantages so much as I haven't had to deal with racism on top of sexism and classism.

**K.P.:**

As I've said, I grew up in Washington and always identified as Native because we lived in a Native community and practiced Native ways. I lost that identity when I was a Jehovah Witness, and it wasn't until I was leaving the religion and breaking down my authentic self that I was propelled toward who I really was, and who I wanted to live my life as. I only questioned and felt a certain amount of guilt about being Indigenous when I was a practicing Witness, and that was only because I was told that I basically couldn't be Indian and a Witness at the same

time. Then I felt guilty for not being enrolled, not being full-blood, not being around my own reservation or culture, but upon closer examination, that guilt was derived from other people having a problem with it. I also had guilt around claiming Indigeneity because for a period of time, due to religion, I didn't have a strong relationship with my biological Indigenous family.

***Internalization-Commitment*** stage is, per collaborator's collective voice, a work in progress. The outsider perception of the research collaborators directly impacted their self-perception, creating confusion, guilt, and a sense of not belonging. While the impacts of outsider dismissal, skepticism, and suspicion may cover the desire to place the Indigenous individual into a more assimilated (dominant culture) category in order to understand the identity.

Devon A. Mihesuah (1998) focused her research on American Indian identities by utilizing Cross's Life Stages but added that a series of factors needed to be acknowledged when using this model for Indians. She laid out the fact that tribes might share similarities but ultimately have different cultures and ways of dealing with the impacts of colonization. The most interesting part, albeit she wrote this twenty-five years ago, was the emphasis on physicality and presenting as White. In discussing the identity development for Indians, Mihesuah sets that stage for today's pretendianism identity. "...many tribes incorporate members with minimal biological heritage and no knowledge of tribal culture, giving the impression to some that all one needs in order to be Indian is to prove that one has a distant ancestor...many tribal members look phenotypically Caucasian" (p. 16). I find deep irony in this message because it doesn't matter how "Caucasian" a person looks, or how "distant" their potentially one ancestor

on the final Rolls was—if they are a federally enrolled tribal member then they can claim legal and political Indian identity and status.

The fear that tribes would become whitewashed and no longer recognizable reminds me of Adrienne Keene's personal essay aptly titled, "Love in the Time of Blood Quantum" (2011) that demonstrated the problematic position of falling in love and having babies with falling in love with another Native and having Native babies—one love carries on Indian political status, the other does not. Keene (2013) writes about the original essay that "Love by fractions is pretty thin love...I don't want to just date so I can have an Indian baby. I want to fall in love. I want to find someone who loves all of me—the Indian parts and the non-Indian parts." For many mixed-heritage folks, they can know and recognize the parts that make them whole, as well as know the exterior parts that outsiders judge from; these elements create three categories of identity: self/internal-identity, family/community-identity, and outsider/external identity. These do not always recognize each other and cause disruption and identity crises.

For me, as the researcher, the obvious and observable common threads that weave this project together with the theme of community belonging are found within these collaborator stories. Regardless of identity stages, or where one is located within their own story, I am positioning that the body, heart, mind, and spiritual experiences around identity and belonging for Indigenous Americans (enrollment or not) share more similarities than differences.

**We Are All Stardust**

The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous People's Rights and Education reads: "The right to be indigenous is an essential prerequisite to developing and maintaining culturally appropriate and sustainable education for indigenous peoples" (Grande, 2015, p. 15). The concept of *the right to be* (insert any marginalized, underrepresented group of people across the world) what a person is born as is so blatantly preposterous that certainly all human beings understand this to be *an inherent right*, not a thing that has to be fought for? Rhetorical question? No, because situating this research inside Indigenous Methodologies presupposes being Indigenous is an inherent right. This is where the concepts of red pedagogy find a home within my research methodologies and methods because:

What distinguishes red pedagogy is its base in hope. Not the future dash centered hope of the western imagination, but rather, a hope that lives in contingency with the past dash one that trusts the beliefs and understanding of our ancestors as well as the power of traditional knowledge. A red pedagogy is, thus, as much about belief and acquiescence as it is about questioning and empowerment, about respecting the space of tradition as it intersects with the linear time frames of the post-modern world. Most of all it is a hope that believes in the strength and resiliency of indigenous peoples and communities, recognizing that their struggles are not about inclusion and enfranchisement to the new world order new world order is in quotes but, rather, are part of the indigenous project of sovereignty and indigenization. (McLaren, 2004, p.29)

The other important piece of utilizing a red pedagogy framework is the impetus placed upon identity, and identity politics, and as Sandy Grande (2022) stated in a recent interview when asked about her critique of identity politics, or what she called the “identity paradox,” for Native Americans:

So much of identitarian politics has been taken over, and it no longer resembles how the women of Combahee talked about identity politics...so much of it centers the individual and the human in ways that I don't think are helpful for the overall political project, not a decolonial project, anyway. If that's the starting point--the individual—then, to me, you're already defeated. Whereas if you start elsewhere, with care for land, care for water, then it would be different.

This passage sings to my heart, is balm to my spirit, energizes my body, and empowers my mind. The de-centering of the individual and focus on the collective, the community, the human and non-human connections is the work of the future; it is the way to survive and thrive in the future.

Bronwyn Carlson (2011) in discussing the Confirmation of Aboriginality process in Australia has this to say, which parallels the experiences of many Indigenous Americans during the times, and aftermath, of termination, relocation, and forced removal eras:

The process for individuals to acquire evidence of their Aboriginality can be complex, tedious, and invoke considerable pain and anxiety. Those from remote Aboriginal communities or relocated and/or reconstructed Aboriginal communities formed in the Mission and Reserves eras generally have an easier time gaining confirmation in the communities to which they have always or long belonged.

Those individuals who are descended from Aboriginal people who moved away, or were moved in previous generations can have a much more difficult time providing evidence. Aboriginal people who were able to escape the control of colonial and government administrations and live relatively independently have the most difficult time of all, particularly when this is used in community discourse as evidence of choosing to abandon Aboriginal kin and values. There is also a lack of consistent historical documentation around Aboriginal births, deaths and marriages, around the movement of Aboriginal people for survival, work, or forced relocations, and a lack of census-taking in relation to Aboriginal people in earlier periods. (p.180)

The point in drawing parallels to Australian Aboriginal identity politics provides more evidence that settler-colonial and colonial projects follow a playbook of dividing and separating Indigenous peoples, stealing resources, and having Indigenous groups fight for the same resources, and participate in sustaining the obstacles to reunification and reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous rights and cultures. Taken apart, the pieces of identity politics are magnified, and what would happen piece-by-piece if Indigenous people defied the identity machine? Quagmire is the perfect description of Indigenous identity politics and ongoing or returning issues erupting from it because it is a vague but distinct thing, this quagmire. *Merriam-Webster* provides two possibilities: “soft miry land that shakes or yields under the foot,” or “a difficult, precarious, or entrapping position: predicament.” Either way, there is a position to take, or be given, or have taken away when it comes to Indigenous identity.

Jodi Byrd (2012) explains Indigenous identity formations as a quagmire:

To understand the quagmire of Indigenous identity formations, one must simultaneously grapple with the multiple and often divergent political and social conditions that have served to constrain the rights of Indigenous communities inherently have to self-governance, land ownership, linguistic traditions, and spiritual and cultural patrimonies. (p. 168)

It is of import to continually restate that, prior to settler-colonization, the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island as they had since time immemorial, lived in bands, clans, pueblos across the land; they did not identify themselves as one large tribe or tribes, like how the five civilized tribes, and others, came to be known. There was intermixing between groups through marriage, war, and bringing in outsiders. Indigenous people also lived according to their region's seasonal calendar, seeking resources for sustenance and to support expansion. When scholars argue that Native Americans did not "own" land or property before settler arrival and subsequent colonization, this is true because ownership was not a concept or practice within the Native worldview. What also was true is that there were areas that certain "tribes" used and in modern rhetoric would undoubtedly lay claim to. Claim doesn't beget money, profit, or investment that way that the Euro-dominant settler-colonial expression of property ownership meant. I cannot locate exact numbers, as I do not believe the data exists, for how many different Indigenous groups were on the land when settler-colonizers began to encroach upon the existing community environments and displace them—where did all these Indigenous people go? Who claimed them? What did they do to survive?

For a real world example, my ancestors from the Chowanoke/Chowanoc/Chawan or Chowan Indians (referenced below as Thomas Hoyle and Chief Hoyter) who lived in what is now called North Carolina, among many other smaller bands of Indians and were relocated and absorbed into other tribes by the 1700s, or “disappeared”—a fate of many Eastern and Southeastern bands and tribes, so where do we place descendants of this tribe and other tribes who experienced this type of erasure—not from history, as you can read for yourself below—but from modern day Indianess?

The Chowan Indians were one of many “tribes” in what we call the state of North Carolina. According to historical records, they didn't experience much trouble with the settler-colonizers until around 1650, when too many settlers began encroaching on their lands and fighting. In the next fifty years, they lost most of their homelands and their people dwindled in numbers. In 1712, missionary Giles Rainsford of the English Church, wrote:

I had conference with one Thomas Hoyle King of the Chowan Indians who seem very inclinable to embrace Christianity and proposes to send his son to school . . . I readily offered him my service to instruct him myself . . . where I lodge being but three miles distant from his Town. But he modestly declined it for the present till a general peace was concluded between the Indians and the Christians.

(Rights, 1958)

What I find interesting in this letter is that Thomas Hoyle (Hoyter) declined the missionary's services until “a general peace was concluded between the Indians and the Christians.” Perhaps those were not the identifying terms he actually used, as they are relayed by Giles Rainsford, but nevertheless, the use of “Christian” to imply white

settler-colonizers indicates that Indians were people, and the settler-colonizers were their religion. In modern times, with culture and religious wars permeating the news media, many of us lament the absence of humanity and how the priority of (religious) ideals and beliefs over literal human lives is prevalent. It is clear to me that Indians are less than/other than Christians: identity politics has been with us from the beginning.

In 1718 and 1720 petitions were filed by Chief Hoyter complaining that the settlers were continually intruding upon the lands of the Indians and that the limits of the territory had never been determined. In the former petition he also asked for payment due one of his tribesmen by a settler for an Indian slave of the Core Sound region. In 1723 a reservation of 53,000 acres was laid out for the Tuscarora and the Chowan. By the year 1731 the tribe had dwindled to less than twenty families. In 1752 Bishop Spangenberg wrote from Edenton, "The Chowan Indians are reduced to a few families, and their land has been taken away from them." A report of Governor Dobbs in 1755 stated that the tribe consisted of two men and five women and children who were 'ill used by their neighbors'. (Rights, 1958)

My paternal lineage flows from the Hoyter/Hoyle/Hiter (Thomas being my 6<sup>th</sup> great-grandfather) ancestors intermarried with White settlers, Cherokee, and Choctaw. My line from Hoyter follows Freeman, Ball, James, Jenkins, and McDaniel (my birth name). This is more than a story, an interesting anecdote, or historical recounting, for if one pulls at the threads, the unraveling is both metaphorical and literal of what happened during the settler-colonial invasion of the Eastern and Southeastern lands *before* Turtle

Island was claimed by the settler-colonial Americans in 1776: Indigenous identities were being erased, lost, and hidden.

Examining historical records and stories, is to be reminded not only of the researched and reported on tools of settler-colonial genocide, but of the concept and purpose of acculturation. Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran (1995) in their groundbreaking book *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*, state: “Another form of ongoing trauma is through the forced acculturation of Native American people... Acculturation stress is a continuing factor in the perpetration of anxiety, depression, and other symptomatology that is associated with PTSD...” (p. 32). I recognized elements of assimilation and acculturation in my own ancestor’s journeys. It would be ignorant to place blame or attempt to situate myself in their time and space with ideas or opinions, as it would be nothing more than conjecture. Nobody knows what they will do or not do, give, or give away, submit to or not in the face of survival. Duran and Duran (1995) offered the following stages to facilitate understanding of Intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder: First Contact, Economic Competition, Invasion War Period, Subjugation and Reservation Period, Boarding School Period, and Forced Relocation and Termination Period (p. 33-35). Viewing specific issues, such as identity politics, through the lens of intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder grounds the research process, data collection and analysis, and the reporting of findings within an Indigenous worldview that is dominated by a temporal approach to the world and that there is no separation between the human and non-human world. “Western thought conceptualizes history in a linear temporal sequence, whereas most Native American thinking conceptualizes history in a spatial fashion” (Duran and Duran, 1995, p. 14).

This is vital in understanding that all the stages of intergenerational posttraumatic stress disorder are connected throughout time and space and can be collective memory.

Western thought maintains that humans are separate (and dominant) systems from all non-human systems, and identifies everything according to humans being dominant, then categorizes and sub-categorizes humans according to the most powerful.

The Western perception of time is linear; therefore, each generation would deal with only what they directly experience(d) and essentially the trauma, per se, would be contained in that specific generation. Indigenous perception of time as non-linear and circular is the foundation for how trauma unfolds throughout generations, directly or indirectly. I correlate the beginnings of stories—*Once Upon a time, In the Time of, Back in the Time When*—to be indicative of how people across the world considered time before Westernization.

## Closing Reflections

**Figure 11**

*War is Heck*



*Note.* Jaune Quick-to-See Smith “War is Heck” painting.

War is heck, indeed. I had the beautiful opportunity to attend a gallery opening and artist talk with Jaune Quick-to-See Smith, an enrolled member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Metis, and Shoshone descent) pre the world-wide pandemic and subsequent shut down of public spaces. Settler-colonialism is war. Identity politics can be war. Wars within wars. Will humanity ever be without war? Even if an entire military force isn't fighting against us, will we continue to divide and separate into fractions of Indigeneity and irreparably damage or lose the whole picture? Or is this the way it is meant to be, a mythological journey returning to the beginning when Indigenous people belonged to small communities and fended for themselves?

This chapter also brings to memory that it wasn't in vogue, trendy, or particularly safe to identify as Native even less than twenty years ago. I don't believe that time goes faster, I think that technology growth increases at a faster pace and makes it feel like time is truncated. It doesn't matter if people have access to more information, people will believe the narratives that they want, that benefit their worldview and position because it validates personal and group positionality. I'd argue that it is more difficult to have an effective and mutually respectful discourse for truth-finding in the modern world than it ever was. These cultural and societal elements impact the world of Indigenous identity politics.

### SECTION III: West & Mind

#### Origin Stories

*Two origin stories of the Okla (People) Chahta (Choctaw) are both of emerging from one place to another, or traveling from one place to another. One is that the Okla came from the earth at Ninah Waya and the other is the Okla migrated from the southwest and followed two brothers, Chicksa and Chahta, and every evening they erected a pole in the center of the camp—whichever direction the pole bent toward in the morning, they followed. At a point in the journey, there was yet another morning of the pole guiding the Okla further north, and one brother and his relatives went north, the other stayed in the spot that we now call Mississippi, and thus the two groups--Chickasaw and Choctaw--came into being.*

## CHAPTER SIX | THE SACRED HOOP

### ***The Sacred Hoop: Collaboration Foundations***

The loss of equitable (social and cultural) power that Indigenous women traditionally held within their communities was imposed through systems and structures set forth by settler-colonial patriarchy, thus changing the landscape of Indigeneity for everyone. Approaching the inherent pre-colonial concept of feminism from a dichotomous colonizer/colonized view, this section provides argument and evidence for the return of an ideology and value system that is inclusive and honoring women, and all expressions of gender and sexuality within the human experience.

The Sacred Hoop is homage to the brilliant writer and activist, Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) who wrote the seminal book, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986), that pulls apart the settler-colonial patriarchal mindset and its lasting effects on Indigenous societies. Gunn Allen surmises that "for millennia American Indians have based their social systems, however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused worldviews" (1986, p.2). I posit that the structure of Christian patriarchy as it dominates the western world, seeping between the best filled cracks, is a form of what Graham Hingangaroa Smith, Maori scholar, termed "politics of distraction"—"the colonizing process of being kept busy by the colonizer, of always being on the 'back-foot', 'responding', 'engaging', 'accounting', 'following', and 'explaining' (2003, p. 2). This is the time-worn art of shape-shifting by making a thing (honoring and empowering women) irrelevant at best, dangerous at worst, for the sake of power. To change a mindset and worldview of the masses, who arguably possess a

sort of (self) imposed memory loss, an infectious cultural amnesia, may seem impossible, but so was sending humans to space.

Sarah Nickel (2020) writes in her introduction of *In Good Relation: History, Gender, and Kinship in Indigenous Feminisms*, talks about how for Kim Tallbear and Leanne Betasamoske Simpson the term Indigenous feminism “became synonymous with ‘acting in good relations’ and ‘being responsible’ to community” (p. 2); and continues to provide this definition of Indigenous Feminisms:

Put simply, Indigenous feminisms reflect and capture the multiple ways in which gender and race, and therefore the systems of power related to these (sexism, racism, and colonialism) shape Indigenous peoples’ lives. Indigenous feminisms have the potential to expose and destabilize patriarchal gender roles and the structures that sustain and promote continued Indigenous dispossession and disempowerment through colonialism. (p. 3)

Connected to how systems of power need to be exposed in order to decrease the negative impacts of the patriarchal, white supremacist, colonial, capitalist projects, attention to the concept of white privilege needs to be examined through the lens of Indigenous Feminisms. Peggy McIntosh (1989, 2019) in her seminal essay, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” discusses that acknowledging how white privilege dominates social structures and is steeped in unearned advantages that allow for the domination over a society and at the same time, ignores or denies the very same dominance. “The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here” (p. 33). We can take out “white” and put in whatever term applies when critically examining the impacts of silence, denial, and misappropriation of tools such as identity

politics on Native Americans and Indigenous Peoples worldwide. White privilege, White women privilege, male privilege, and all the privileges that come with the settler-colonial project cannot be charted, nor given voice or space. Those groups in privileged positions will never relinquish their status or power. Individuals may explore their role in the process and try for reconciliation or resolution. However, the gross general population that benefits from “white-privilege” is not going to literally give it up. Groups can talk about it, scholars and social activists can write about it, workshops and retreats can offer enlightenment to the abstract notion of one group of people being privileged over another, and research can be done that exposes the social and cultural truths, political impacts, and inequitable, generational, long-term effects but all this will serve is to make certain folks feel or think a certain way.

Change in ideology that forms the social structure and systems does not happen without collapse or destruction of the existing power. This is exactly how settler-colonialism and colonialism operate. My assessment is to stop using the term “white-privilege” because it implies an inherent power in being White, denying the past and history of Indigenous peoples by situating the privileged as a completely separate entity that needs to acknowledge their culpability in colonization and the subsequent formation of society when, in reality, that is giving the white privileged people the choice to either stay privileged or not, and if they don’t want to be privileged it doesn’t matter because they are, and will be, and it’s invisible to them but not to the rest of us that live among.

In the new preface to *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen (1992) writes that in the years after the first completion in 1884 and publication in 1986, a still pertinent and truthful passage about the continued visibility, inherent rights, authentic narratives,

culture, and identity of Native Americans. To appreciate her thoughts, I am including in full the essence of what I determine is a reminder, a call to action, and a futurism that is articulated as:

Our cultural restoration includes political issues such as self-determination for tribal communities, federal recognition of tribes considered “extinct” by the United States, identification of numerous clusters of Indian peoples who before remained “hidden” throughout the United States, increased funding for realization of tribal sovereignty, and the reburial of human remains carted away to storage in countless bins in museums and universities. Our recovery also looks to economic issues, such as adequate, Indian-oriented health care, fair employment practices, educational parity, and economic development for rural and urban Indian communities. It encompasses the widespread return of Indian people from every tribe to traditional practices and celebrations, the continuing and increasing publication of literary works by American Indian authors, and exhibitions of American Indian arts—both contemporary and traditional—in Indian-owned and -operated museums and galleries as well as in wealthier venues recognized by peoples around the world. These occurrences, along with a growing number of films, plays, dance performances, and scholarship devoted to themes of American Indian life and thought, constitute a mighty cultural flowering, a truly Native American Renaissance. (x)

From an Indigenous feminisms lens, Gunn Allen presents that traditional societal structures of Native Americans were “more often gynocritic than not, and they are never patriarchal,” and this concept of looking into the not so distant past to locate and

position ways of being that if brought forward into the future, either as a means of re-claiming or rejecting the white-supremist patriarchal systems of the modern society we live within, should not be lumped into the common refrain, well, that's the way it used to be or times are different—not in terms of cultural revival. Some would argue that Native American culture is ever-present, doesn't need re-claiming, revival, or outside confirmation for validity. I argue that as there are millions of Native people on Turtle Island, in addition to over 500 recognized tribes and just as many unrecognized bands, clans, tribes that live in vastly different geographical locations, have more cultural differences than shared cultural practices, and with an ever-growing anti-Pan-Indianism sentiment, not to mention that as a traditionally oral culture for transmission of culture, perhaps it is worthwhile and prudent to adhere to the practice of cultural revival.

Gunn Allen (1992) fleshes out the particulars that separate Indigenous movements from others:

American Indians are not merely doomed victims of western imperialism or progress; they are also the carriers of the dream that most activist movements claim to be seeking. The major difference between most activist movements and tribal societies is that for millennia American Indians have based their social systems, however diverse, on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused worldviews. In tribal gynocratic systems a multitude of personality and character types can function positively within the social order because the systems are focused on social responsibility rather than on privilege and on the realities of the human constitution rather than on denial-based social fictions to which human beings are compelled to conform by powerful individuals within the society. (p. 2- 3)

Related to the puritanical overtures of settler-colonialism and system of capitalism, this idea gains traction as not only an explanation of how Native Americans have arrived at the current cultural state, but also why so many are fighting, intellectually, socially, politically, and economically to instill “traditioneity” into the fabric of Indian life. The term “traditioneity” was created by a student, L. Harter (Lakota) during a quarter in the Native Pathways Program exploring and examining the themes of Leadership and Resistance Movements. In keeping with Indigenous pedagogy, students were encouraged to consider not just the theories, ideologies, and histories, but to determine a praxis. Harter developed “traditioneity” as a means of acting in a traditional way.

Of course, one needs to know their traditions, teachings, and is this possible for everyone who is Native? I personally know many tribally enrolled people who don't live on or near their reservations or homelands, do not have any (or limited) connections with their peoples, as well as many tribally enrolled people who do live amongst their peoples, yet have no concept of their tribal constitution or cultural practices. All of this was and is the objective of settler-colonialism and the U.S. government—these power structures care little who knows their culture, their traditional ways of being and knowing, for that would negate the very purpose of the genocidal project of dealing with the “Indian problem.” It would also fly in the face of patriarchal expectations, for in the case scenario, only males could ask how to practice traditioneity.

The core of Christianity and white-supremacy and patriarchy is that women are less than and certainly not fit for positions of consequence, decision-making, or power. Women are not leaders, as they are weaker in all aspects of humanness—mind, body,

heart, and spirit. What better way to destroy any culture, any group of people, than to systematically seek and destroy all ways women have agency, social standing, cultural bearing, and power within social structures. Beth Brant (1988) introduces the stories of the women included in the collection, *A Gathering of Spirit*, by offering the concept of Sister, and Sisterhood. She writes:

What holds us to that word is our commonness as Indians—as women. We come from different Nations. Our stories are not the same. Our dress is not the same. Our color is not the same. *Yet, we are the same.* ...The story that hasn't changed for hundreds, maybe thousands of years. The retelling. The continuity of spirit. We believe in that. We believe in community in its most basic form. We recognize each other. Visible spirit. (p. 10)

I agree with her assessment that story is the most common denominator between time and space, retelling the ways in different places and forms that community defines the essence of Indigeneity. "The continuity of spirit" remains the pulse of survival, a recognizable thing within imposed and defined boundaries. Audre Lorde (2015) says that women need to be in community to reach any form of liberation yet must continue to keep cultural and ethnic and racial differences rather than be forced into siloed categories that increase vulnerability. I concur with this wisdom and argue that without a solid community of women, the journey toward Indigenizing (or liberating) any settler-colonial, White-male, patriarchal space will not be sustainable. Lorde continues with:

Those of us who stand outside the circle of this society's definition of acceptable women; those of us who have been forged in the crucibles of difference; those of

us who are poor, who are lesbians, who are black, who are older, know that *survival is not an academic skill*. (Moraga and Anzaldua, p. 94)

The most dangerous part is the recontextualizing. It is pure trickery. This common practice is often done without intention because the patriarchy is so deeply ingrained in our contemporary life and lifestyles that it becomes an invisible, perceptible to only those firmly immersed in trapping it and calling it out (which is an exhausting, unrelenting place to be), that to pursue what some would call idealistic, unrealistic, or at worst victimry is another attempt of cultural eradication of Native Americans. To be in a constant state of explanation, defensive, and demand for proof is systematic oppression. It is also a western settler colonial tool that relies on the majority of society (all peoples) to prescribe to a dominant way of thinking that denies the validity or legitimacy of the minds and spirits of Native American peoples. The dominant western mindset is always in search of securing power. Power over others, resources, thought, and the future.

LeAnne Howe, Choctaw writer, says that “Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes. America is a tribal creation story, a tribalogy” (2013, p.13). This is where Indigenous power grows from--within the stories carried forward.

### ***The Hoop***

The following collaborator stories are braided together from three Indigenous women over the age of forty. Audre Lorde (1982) in a speech at Harvard says, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.” In line with this sentiment, being a woman, Indigenous, an academic, and a mother are the

common threads that permeate the worldviews and lived experiences of these women's stories. These identities cannot be separated from one another.

### ***Collaborators***

**T.M.**, age 58, identifies as a Chickasaw descendant from her father's lineage and grew up between Washington State and Oklahoma State. She attended three institutions before completing her undergraduate degree and one institution to earn her master's degree (2016), across the span of thirty-two years following high school graduation.

**K.A.**, age 43, identifies as an unenrolled Luiseno from her father's lineage and grew up in Western Washington State. She attended three institutions before completing her undergraduate degree and one institution to earn her master's degree (2012), across the span of thirteen years following high school graduation.

**C.B.**, age 59, identifies as not enrolled but of Ioway descendancy from her father's lineage and grew up in Vermillion, South Dakota. She attended three institutions for her undergraduate degree and two for her master's degree (1995), across the span of fourteen years following high school graduation.

**S.L.**, age 40, identifies as Upper Skagit and Nooksack (enrolled Nooksack), Coast Salish author, and queer Indigenous punk.

**C.J.**, age 76, identifies as woman, mother, grandmother, and affiliated with the Turtle Mountain Chippewa Tribe.

My story is similar: age 50, identifies as unenrolled (Mississippi band) Choctaw descendant, Chowanoke descent, Mexican (Chihuahua), and Scots-Irish born in

southern California and raised primarily in Eastern Washington. I attended two institutions to complete my undergraduate degree and one institution for my graduate degree (2009) across the span of twenty years following high school graduation.

Where applicable, It is important to note my researcher role intersects with the research participants because of our relationships and the collaborative nature of this project; I provided the draft of this research project, particularly highlighting the stories, and my interpretation, for feedback and approval as not only an ethical and appropriate way of being but as a an authentic desire to wholly represent these women and their stories within this contentious and emotionally charged topic, as they have entrusted me. These women are colleagues and sister friends who work in various roles in higher education with Native and Indigenous students. My relationships span from seven to over twenty years. At the point of this initial talking circle, we all worked within the Native Pathways Program at the Evergreen State College. K.A. and I are currently enrolled at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiārangi pursuing doctoral work. Both K.A. and T.S. earned their undergraduate and graduate degrees (BA) in the Reservation-Based Community-Determined program, now called Native Pathways Program (NPP, and the Master in Public Administration (MPA) with an emphasis on Tribal Governance at the Evergreen State College.

We began by catching up with each other's lives, sharing work stories, and the conversation organically flowed into the first topic: *defining identity politics within the world of Indigeneity*.

**T.S.:**

Identity politics identifies as the basis of personal, not political. Identity politics used to be used to wield power. Not being accepted in the non-Native world was often a consequence for identifying as Native, and not until the Civil Rights Movement were the results of identifying as Native rarely positive. Today, we can now identify as Native without shame and mixed-heritage is honored. There are the self-imposed gatekeepers of identity, Indigenous identity, and I've dealt with that by staying small and not drawing attention to myself in order to stay safe within the education system, both as a student and as a professional.

**K.A.:**

Indigenous politics is imposed on Indigenous people through blood quantum, enrollment in tribes, tribal citizenship, disenrollment, and erasure practices of both the federal government and tribal governments. Identity politics can be weaponized (for example the Nooksack 306, where 306 tribal members were disenrolled). There can also be a positive impact with identity politics, for example Alcatraz and the Fishing Wars-- those were centered around Indigenous identity and fighting for Indigenous rights. Today, identity politics is divisive. It's about who belongs and who doesn't belong and who is in authority to decide who belongs and doesn't belong.

**C.B.:**

Identity politics goes back to AIM (American Indian Movement) and the war about representation. Identity politics has taken on a negative connotation during the Obama administration which led to extreme white supremacist backlash against BIPoc (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) that has continued into

the present time. I do consider myself an Indian and Indigenous politically; and am well aware that not being enrolled makes it so that I am not a political Indian, legally. I studied Political Science through my undergraduate work and grew up in academia as my dad was a professor. He was only the second Indian professor hired, after Ella Deloria, at the university. I was raised to “check the box” if it helps Native people, but if it takes the place of an enrolled tribal member, I *never* check the box. When I identify, inside of Indian Country, as Native, I have to explain myself and my family because I am not a citizen.

Outside of Indian Country, it depends on where I am and who I am around as to how I verbally identify myself as an loway descendant, or not.

Both **K.A.** and **C.B.** were in the military. **C.B.** for four years and **K.A.** for ten years.

**C.B.** talked about at basic training how they segregated by “race” and, because there were not many other Indians, her place was with other people of color and her nickname was, of course, “Chief.”

**K.A.** asks *how does sovereignty work outside of outside of federally recognized tribes?*

We discuss sovereignty’s root meaning--complete power and authority over something--and how just saying those words together is uncomfortable, yet necessary for tribes. Without sovereignty, albeit limited, the (federally recognized) tribes and people would have no political power. The concept of sovereignty from the perspective of a group that doesn’t possess it, reflects another form of othering. On Turtle Island, the U.S. Federal Government, the states, and federally recognized Indian tribes have sovereignty. This is to say that although each of the three levels of governing bodies do

not possess the same sovereignty in terms of power and decision-making, they all theoretically follow popular sovereignty, meaning that all governments are based on the will and consent of the people (being governed). Sovereignty, as given, should be serving the people. But it is not. The citizens of America, the people, do not always get what is their will (e.g., the electoral college vs. the popular vote in presidential elections). Tribes are in a constant cycle of asserting their sovereign rights as independent nations, as their sovereignty is always under attack. This fight for sovereignty will continue in perpetuity because the very essence of a government, specifically a settler-colonial government, is to rule with complete authority, which the U.S. Congress has but still, they have to (legally) provide resources to tribes; as dependent nations, tribes are identified as other and less, which puts them in potential danger of losing political and legal rights under the U.S. government.

The answer to K.A.'s question ended up being--it doesn't.

Sovereignty doesn't work unless you are an enrolled member or citizen of a federally recognized tribe, and this doesn't include state-recognized tribes or 501c3 tribes. Only the U.S. Congress has plenary power (absolute, no limitations) over all federally recognized Indian tribes; the states have no authority unless given by Congress over tribes. The state legislature can formally recognize state tribes, but those tribes do not possess sovereignty, unless they are also federally recognized tribes.

At other points throughout the years of data collection for this research, I met informally and semi-formally with these collaborators and others. The major questions we discussed were: *What place or role does Indigenous identity politics have in higher*

*education? How does identity politics or identifying as Indigenous impact you, or intersect with your other identities? And of course, at the closing of each time together, the open-ended invitation: Anything else you want to share...*

**T.S. responded:**

Academia operates as that intellectual and moral place that filters and overturns power differentials while being self-serving at the same time. The institutions have checkboxes for American Indian/Alaskan Native to show their “good work” recruiting these students, faculty, and staff but ultimately, it doesn't benefit the folks being identified. I feel like in higher education and academia, I am identified by others as “helping woman” and it is a type of othering.

**K.A. responded:**

Indigenous politics is a tool that is weaponized and leads to lateral violence within higher education. it is an insider/outsider issue and self-identifying becomes other people's business. My identity is “in flux.” All the parts of my identity. Nobody else gets to decide who or what I am. I also feel that institutionally, identity politics are used as a way to *other* myself and Indigenous peoples.

**S.L. responded:**

As an indigenous woman, a writer and educator, it's impossible to separate identity politics from how I navigate daily through academic spaces, literary spaces, the world in general. This has both positively and negatively impacted my experiences. Negatively I've encountered certain workshops, classroom environments and other spaces that nonnative attendees, other presenters, and

on occasion students, have put harmful expectations on me as a workshop leader, presenter, reader, etc....navigating these spaces as an Indigenous person I've often been met with the expectation that my lesson plans, my work, my prompts etc., will be rooted solely in my indigeneity.

My work and my approach contain multitudes, I as a Native woman contain multitudes. To be expected to only ever be at one note or be performative about my identity to suit a non-native audience, classroom, or publisher inherently erases me. It demands I make myself small. My identity is often viewed as entitlement to questions regarding Land Acknowledgements, thoughts on cultural appropriation, or details around ceremony. These questions feel invasive and are not my work to do simply because of my indigenous identity.

In a more positive outlook, I've found that indigenous identity politics can provide a sense of community, of being seen and perceived by my other indigenous colleagues, teachers, and writers. It's often incredibly difficult to navigate nonnative literary and academic spaces. I've found when I am in community with other Native writers and educators there is more room for bigger or more important conversations, and that feels really empowering.

I feel hopeful about the future of indigenous identity issues. This is because I see things shifting, specifically in higher education, media and representation, and the literary world. When we uplift more indigenous voices, we become more present in these historically white spaces, we become more visible and more whole, and that feels important.

**C.B. responded:**

Identity is not a strategy. Identity politics has been played out and has lost its effectiveness because the backlash is too strong. The Academy is like a border town; we should be working through the power lines of academia, not identity. Identity politics and higher education for me was, and is, complicated because my dad led the charge to make oral history real history in higher education; and being mixed, I always felt conditional. I also see myself as a classroom teacher and as a mom and as a poet.

Identity politics today is about a type of group purity, which sets up binary divisiveness and degrades buffer zones and mediating forces in and between mixed groups. In the civil Rights era, identity became agency to participate, to have a voice at the table and be a character in the main story, the sweep of history; currently, identity is used to silence some and elevate others based solely on identity.

This fragmentation creates competing stories and competing realities. Because the binaries must be enforced, it is hard to see the whole picture. Zero sum competition normalizes capitalism and dehumanization. Identity politics for Indians, and other marginalized groups, is pessimistic rather than optimistic; once victimization is an authentic part of identity, there can't be de-victimized solutions. Imagination isn't being applied in a way that we can get to a universal win—the exaggerations of the current form (violence, safety) undercuts critical thinking, nuance, and human connection.

When public access was closed by law based on skin color, gender, or sexuality, it made sense to call attention to these lines in the sand, and easier to ostracize, for instance, the “bad white people,” and build something better with the human race. Nowadays, if all white people are seen as bad, or the enemy, but with less and less evidence as years of progress carry on, it feels performative; like folks are fighting the fight of the 1950s or 1960s, ignoring or diminishing the fight that continued between then and now. This type of identity politics also reinforces agism and repudiation of the past.

The job of anti-racism (and anti-Indianism) is harder now, not because the problems are worse, but because the problems are more abstract and in need of *more* nuanced, risky, and connective conversation...not less! The practice of identity politics today is anti-spiritual and rejects the cosmos and our shared fate on earth, which our survival depends on—this shared cosmological destiny, literally.

In the wide-world of identity politics, do we have to choose one identity, particularly when it comes to legal Indian status identity—that political identity which has strict boundaries. Do we as unenrolled descendants have a bigger scope of how we identify because we are not grounded in the recognized political identity? These collaborator stories share a respect for tribal sovereignty and at the same time concern for future generations not having a legitimate place within tribal communities because of blood quantum and other enrollment criteria. There is worry that traditional ways of knowing are not being passed on in a way that reflect cultural values and that create divisive

politics. Identity politics becomes a route by which oppression and subjugation are blamed on the groups that are purportedly benefiting from having the illusory power of being identified, yet it's a form of othering that produces this "...subtle way to deny oppression and privilege is to call them something else, thereby creating the appearance of being in touch with reality without having to do something about it" (Johnson, 2006, p.111). It's the common blame the victim mentality that is complicated by the insidiousness in that the victims often identify themselves with the groups. "The truth doesn't matter because ideology isn't about truth or accuracy. Rather, its purpose is to support and perpetuate the status quo by making it appear normal and legitimate" (Johnson, 2006, 113). Identity politics attends to the needs of both the group being identified and the dominant social group.

We have sovereignty over our stories, the narratives that have the power to effect change, heal, and carry us forward in a good way. Jason De Santolo (2019) writing "Indigenous Storywork in Australia," says:

Story is a way forward in the decolonizing movement as deep meaning-making encounter, as expansive creative collaboration. Collaboration breaks down imperialistic boundaries and reimagines collective will according to Indigenous-inspired strategies of transformation. (p. 171)

Story is the best way of building relationality and reciprocity within community. And there is great responsibility to honor and hold another's story. In the fast-paced modern day, we don't always give space for story, in an organic, traditional sense. In Indigenous circles, we practice this form of connection and culture not as a task or chore, but as a way of being in the world.

I have been given the great honor of being in community with an elder, C.J., who is a compelling, hilarious, and “make-no-bones-about-it” storyteller. She is also a leader, change-maker, and community builder in, and outside, Indian Country. De Santolo’s explanation of story as “expansive creative collaboration,” is an apt description of how C.J. engages in her storytelling—she often requires an active participant in the story, not a passive listener. It is with power and purpose that she has tirelessly worked to realize Indian rights to higher education, environmental and land protection, and traditional cultural practices. For the semi-informal interview, she requested I come to her house in the woods for tea or coffee. I brought sweet treats, fruit, plant medicine, and a book of poetry.

**C.J.** gave me her basic bio through higher education and professional work:

I graduated high school in 1965 then attended a community college and quit. Earned my 2-year Associates degree from a Community College in 1975. I got my Bachelor of Arts in Native American Studies from the Evergreen State College in 1977—the work I did was in Native American Studies and Museumology. I studied with Mary Ellen Hillaire, the first Indian woman hired at the college. After graduating, I took a break and worked before going back and earning my Master’s in Public Administration and Tribal Governance in 1992. I have worked as deputy director of GOIA (Government Office of Indian Affairs), as a tribal liaison at the Department of Commerce and the Department of Transportation. I’ve also been a business owner, museum director, and a tribal planner.

Before I ask the first question, we talk a bit about the medicines she makes using ulsnea (from her land) and turkey tail. And I admire her house, which she built (literally) from a design based on elements of the Longhouse style. We sit down with tea and a sweet concoction I got from a local Indian (East Indian, India) market. We chat about the college and the Native American and Indigenous programs, the legacy of Mary Ellen Hillaire and then she motions for me to “begin.”

*What is your understanding of identity politics?*

**C.J.:** The most critical issue in Indian country today is identity. It serves to cut people out, leave people behind, and deny access to people who have not lived near their culture all due to government policies. Identity politics elevates and lifts the haves and the have nots causing a struggle within tribes for power and control. Identity politics is exclusionary and a completely white European structure that's been superimposed and used and embraced throughout Indian Country. It defines reality for if you don't have *that* card, you're not a real Indian. Identity politics is based on resources from the federal government based on \*\*\*\*\* bullshit treaties that weren't honored. We should be looking at the strength of belonging and the strength of family.

The rest of our time together became more of an informal interview, a storytelling. C.J. talked about her journey of her family leaving Turtle Mountain reservation and moving to Yakima. She was born on the Colville reservation because the “Yakima hospital wouldn't take Indians.” Her Dad was Indian and her Mom was

White and when she asked, *What am I?* Her Dad said: “You are Indian,\*\*\* \*\*\*\* , be proud.”

Talking about her time during the Indian Rights Movement period, she told me about how things were back then and what it meant to be an Indian.

**C.J.:** When I occupied Fort Lawton and Alcatraz and participated in the Fish Wars, nobody ever said “you are not Indian” – you never heard about enrollment or anything of this sort. I didn’t even know about enrollment until I was in my 20s, and even living on the reservations, I never heard people talk about enrollment. My dad was an enrolled Turtle Mountain Chippewa and four of my brothers are enrolled in the tribe. When I called the tribe, they said, “you aren’t enough Indian.” This was the politics before the new Constitution-- prior to that you had to have 1/2 Indian blood. I have a descendant card.

At school I wanted to learn about carving and Coast Salish art and my art teacher said “that’s not real art.” When I invited John Fire Lane Deer to open up the art show that I put together at my Community College, the same art teacher said again that it was not real; Indian art was not real.

When I started at Evergreen and took Mary Ellen Hillaire’s class, Mary Ellen told me I was “Indian enough for her class,” because during class a brown Indian student took issue because of my fair complexion--because at Evergreen at that time--you were either Indian or you were not Indian; it became a real identity issue. I grew up saying I was part Indian. 500 years of French-English-Scotch-Irish mixing due to the fur trade and settler colonialism in Canada,

through the Dakotas and the Great Lakes all the way to Hudson Bay—yeah, people were mixed.

Identity politics is \*\*\*\*\* from the beginning. People got lost, disowned, gave up and left, and survived. They did what they needed to get a job and stay alive. The feds dictated identity, and we will always be the losers when that happens.

Identity politics and tribal citizenship policies will have to change. Our Indian people will marry themselves out of existence. We have to change the enrollment criteria and evolve toward a family, not economic system. Right now, we follow a European model of entitlement to citizenship where we must have a title, documentation, rules and not Native American oral histories. Endeavor resurgence of social and community events like the Canoe Journey, Buffalo hunting, and a return to ancestral lands that will bring people back together. We also need to have some sort of adoption and reclaiming family members as part of tribal enrollment process.

I prompted C.J. to share the process of designing and completing her graduate (MPA, Tribal Governance) capstone that was instrumental in getting the state funding for the first Native American Longhouse on a public college campus built (1995). She told the story about developing her capstone and how the process of building the Longhouse became all about identity politics, and not in a positive or beneficial way. One of the non-Natives that gets credit for the Longhouse being built, consistently called it the “log house” even when corrected. The structure of the Longhouse was based on “the philosophy of personal authority, mutual authority brought forward as the founding

concepts of Mary Ellen Hillaire.” The same non-Native administrator at the college told C.J. that continuing the work of Mary Ellen was “incestuous.” I was aghast when she shared this highly offensive term. We talked about how there can’t be too many Natives working together because that’s considered “incestuous,” but there are masses of White folks working together and carrying on or expanding each other’s work and neither of us have ever heard *that* term used to describe *that* work!

I asked *what do you think about pretendians and the future?*

**C.J.:** I’ll say this about pretendians—and those who are going after so-called pretendians--there are gatekeepers who are filtering, and they need to take care to not harm those already harmed because it’s a double-edged sword. People who have been lost to policies and genocidal practices are trying to build a connection and then there are also actual people that “play Indian.” You are born into a family and who you are and what you do is important within that family. There is blood family that you are born into and then there’s the mutually shared authority that you grow into in your teen years, which is the key to resolving our identity politics dilemma. We need to value person identity and personal authority. Mary Ellen Hillaire’s teachings were based around student (individual) strength of character and self-knowledge. We are so radically removed from our original selves because the social fabric is tattered—poverty, boarding schools, tribal politics, federal politics, the continual cycle of genocidal policies and practices.

I think, on my drive out of the woods and the sanctity of C.J.'s home, that we are just back enmeshed in the circle of identity and authority and individualism vs. collectivism and capitalism from fifty years ago. But not. We have new ways of approaching and critically, pragmatically tackling problems and a propensity for creative solutions. There is hope. Jodi Byrd (2012) responding to Sandy Grande states:

As *Red Pedagogy* delineates in detail, obsessions over Indigenous identity and authenticity often serve as politics of distractions, absencing many of the quotidian lived experiences of Indigenous peoples by abjecting them in favor of a standard of genuine legitimacy that is impossible to meet or conclusively prove. Withing the United States, American Indians are caught within the temporal time zones of colonialism that limit them to the authenticity of a long dead past. (p. 169)

Byrd posits that in the recent past, Indigenous feminisms and queer studies have demonstrated how the dominant structures and social underpinnings of heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy coincide with colonialism and racism to “further Indigenous dispossession and loss of identity and culture” (2012, p. 171). I absorb this content and context and know that the ancestors, as the elders are, show us the path and the tools to continue the repossession of all that has been lost.

### **Closing Reflections**

No matter how many times I read, talk, or write about Native America, genocide, historical narratives, misrepresented or misappropriated stories, I am always enraged at the core of my being. It's always there, waiting to be triggered or called to attention. It is

a necessary and valued part of my whole being; it often keeps me in balance by adding to the heartbreak to dull it or take over my over-thinking, perseverance of a mind to give me a moment to focus on something else or to remind me that my spirit is alive and undaunted by the past or the future. This is how I feel after reflecting on the shared stories presented in this chapter through a lens of Indigenous Feminisms. My reaction, at this stage in the project, that I feel compelled to acknowledge, is how damaging identity politics can be to the essence of an individual person and whole communities, as well as how little humanity regards those deemed other—and admittedly, this surprises me. These women shared stories that were not directly connected to political economy or social status, yet those themes bled from all the storywork. The many manifestations of otherness and othering presented in the collaborator stories was on some level expected (logically and intellectually), and I understand from a visceral level but the enormity of loss and search for belonging left me empty. We are all connected. To each other. To the sky, the land, the water. To all non-human living things. This is why. Our connections get broken, the balance is upset, and there is no reason I feel this way at this moment during the crafting of this chapter—it just is.

**CHAPTER SEVEN | LANDSCAPE OF LEARNING**

Regardless of how a person self-identifies, institutions are structured to bend to the sign of the times, the mirroring of socio-political ideologies in step with the economic sensibilities of the dominant powers. These lines from Jose Olivarez' (2018) poem, "Mexican American Disambiguation," expresses the concept of identity within educational institutions:

with the Mexican American in me, who the colleges love,  
but only on brochures, who the government calls  
NON-WHITE, HISPANIC OR WHITE, HISPANIC, who (p.42, lines 45-47)

The implication is that non-white students are categorized and identified in the public education system in America often for the purpose of governmental or donor funding and to present an outward diversity message—see, look, we welcome people of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities--illustrated by glossy images on websites and marketing materials.

Higher education, and education in general, was not a tool for critical thinking, exploration and examination of theories and philosophies for Indigenous people. The purpose was to promote being civilized, assimilated, and being a productive member of American society (or any other settler-colonial society) insofar as one understood their place in the western, white, Christian dominant ethos. Grande (2004) provides the following background:

A number of seminal political documents were also published during the era of self-determination, including the 'Indian Nations at Risk' report in 1991, the 'White House Conference on Indian Education' report in 1992, and the 'Comprehensive Federal Indian Education Policy Statement' in 1997, and the "Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education' in 1998. In general these reports indicate that while the past thirty years witnessed much progress in Indian education, the road ahead was replete with challenges, providing a litany of statistics that portend a grim picture for Indian education.... Above all, however, the reports testified to the fact that centuries of genocidal and assimilationist policies cannot be undone in a matter of years. The voices of prominent American Indians scholars, educators, and leaders are registered throughout, collectively asserting that systematic oppression, levied at the hands of the federal government, requires an equally systematic federal plan of affirmative action. In other words, and education for decolonization. (p. 17)

Formalized and what I would call "Americanized and controlled" education has plagued Indigenous people since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Congress passed the Indian Civilization Act in 1819 and paid religious entities (missionaries) to essentially civilize the Natives; these were called the mission schools. In 1860, the BIA opened the first boarding school on the Yakama Indian Reservation in Washington State. The first off-reservation boarding school opened in 1879: The Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. Many Native children were stolen or forced to attend these schools. Some were sent willingly by their parents and family members with the belief that it would provide a better future. The physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual abuse these children received was

genocide. The legacy of trauma must be acknowledged and attended to within current education systems, not for reparations (there is no reparation for loss of life), but to ensure that equity (not equality) is attained for Indigenous students.

Grande (2004) continues with how vital the relationship between education and culture is; however, if the relationship between culture and socioeconomic conditions that colonized people experience is not recognized, little change will occur (p. 19).

How do Indigenous people approach indigenizing and decolonizing a system grounded in the goal of oppression even toward those who bend toward the mainstream, dominant culture? The factors of capitalism and socio-economic status play a pivotal role in the structure of the education system as yet another tool to identify and other people. It works to compound external identities, and to continue manipulating the power structure for the gain of the dominant culture. This passage from Scott Kayla Morrison's "*Kela Humma*" (Red Hawk) provides an elder's view of college:

At this college, Aunt Virgie said, you are outnumbered in this place. White men will clothe our bones in whatever fashion they desire. They have no history so they must manipulate ours to make them feel superior. We can do nothing. We cannot teach them because they do not have the memory of their race's birth.

They have not seen the entire animal so they do not know how to reconstruct it out of its bones. *Nahola* is to be pitied. Remember that. (Harjo and Bird, 1998)

The concept of being outnumbered weighs heavily on my psyche. It is an excellent, albeit painful, description of my own experiences within academia. From being a physically obvious *other* in the classroom to having different lived experiences from most of my peers—I was always outnumbered (except in my doctoral program). As a

professional working in higher education, in both public and private institutions, I am outnumbered by the white faculty and administrators with their Western pedagogy and western worldviews. What makes this a struggle is that the Western mindset is regarded as the only, or best, way to be, teach, and learn and to carve out a space for anything alternative or outside the Western way is to identify oneself and be open to potential harm. Indigenous students live within this reality because of the legacy of genocide the education system has entrenched in the individual and collective memory. It is a legacy that holds space for explicit and implicit discrimination and racism, creating challenges and obstacles that detract from sharing knowledge.

In *Indigenizing the Academy*, Vine Deloria Jr (2004) writes in “Marginal and Submarginal,” what many of us know to be absolute truth:

Academia has often been a hotbed of racism because scholars are taught to pretend that they can observe phenomena objectively. In fact they observe data through culturally prescribed categories that restrict the possible answers and understandings to a predetermined few selections. With Western thought primarily a binary, yes/no method of determining truth, so much data is excluded, and so limited are the possible answers that Western knowledge might be regarded as a mere classification system devoid of valid conclusions. (p. 18-19)

According to the Postsecondary National Policy Institute on Native American Students in Higher Education, the Census’ American Community Survey in 2021 showed that “among American Indian or Alaskan Native residents aged 25 or over, only 15.4% had earned a bachelor’s degree or higher. This rate is up from 13.4% in 2010 but falls short of the national rate of 32.9%.” One needs to consider that this is based off AI/AN only

(no mixed-race) total U.S. (counted by the census 2020) of being 1% of the total population; therefore, even though it appears as if AI/AN is half of what the national rate is, that is like comparing apples and oranges. Put another way, over 10 million students that are non-American Indian/Alaskan Native and over age 25 have earned a bachelor's degree, compared with approximately 50,000 American Indian/Alaskan Natives over age 25 earning a bachelor's degree. Since fall 2010, in the American education system, Native American/Alaskan Native enrollment in higher education has decreased 37%--196,000 to 123,000; undergraduate enrollment decreased 40%--179,000 to 107,000; graduate enrollment decreased by 18%--17,000 to 14,000 (2022, pnpi.org).

In the Native Pathways Program, fall of 2023, we serve 202 students (duplicated number 23) at a FTE (full-time equivalency, or 15 credits per student) of 78 students and our retention rate from 2022 to 2023 is 88%. For reference, the other two undergraduate areas of the college are at 73% and 71%, with the overall undergraduate retention rate equaling 73%. I share this data as evidence that Indigeneity, despite the deep wounds perpetuated by settler-colonial institutions, the struggles through intergenerational and historical trauma, socio-economic disadvantages, and challenges of identity and belonging, Indigenous scholarship and leadership is on a community-fulfilling journey of "survivance." Deloria Jr. (2001) says this about higher education:

The goal of much of modern education seems to be socialization...we are training people to present an acceptable profile to the corporate industrial world. Our undergraduate degrees actually certify that the student has a smattering of knowledge about a number of fields, is fairly acquainted with one particular field, and can accommodate himself or herself to institutional life (p. 79).

In context, this was written almost twenty-five years ago, but the sentiment might be recalled that if formal education for Natives was solely determined by the dominant, settler-colonial institutions and academics, this is a reality. The capitalistic machine needs workers, dedicated and trained workers that can “accommodate...to institutional life.” Resistance has, and will continue, to be the force that creates change. “Pedagogy and public education is grounded in western European ontological thought and discourse, providing little room for traditional systems of indigenous-centered expression and identity to be realized,” states Lisa Grayshield, Denny Hurtado, and Amileah Davis in “Indigenous Knowledge and Culture-based Pedagogy” (2015). I agree that this is the the standard story, and I know that there are change-makers and leaders taking up space. Gregory Cajete (2011) lays the truth of the western, settler-colonial model and purpose of education out:

We have been conditioned to seek the rewards and benefits of success in the world that modern education purportedly provides. We are enticed from every direction to pursue careers in law, medicine, business, and the sciences, which form the pillars of western thought and conditioning. Yet in spite of the many American Indian people who have succeeded by embracing western education, many have not been very successful or have dropped out entirely. This is the paradox of modern education that American Indians must continually negotiate. In this negotiation, American Indian people must critically analyze the effects modern education has had on our collective cultural, psychological, and ecological viability. What has been lost and what has been gained by participating in a system of education that does not stem from, or really honor,

our unique indigenous perspectives? How far we go in adapting to such a system before that system literally educates us out of cultural existence? (p.319-320)

Following Brayboy's (2001) Tribal Critical Race Theory's 6<sup>th</sup> tenet that calls attention to the ever-present purpose of assimilation with governmental and educational policies toward Indigenous Peoples, we can address institutions of higher education through the lens of anti-assimilation and circumvent the lurking implicit narrative of Western dominant education being the best practice. Justin Guillory, President of the Northwest Indian College, (where I worked for over five years), discusses the benefits of collaboration and partnerships between mainstream institutions and tribal colleges in his chapter, "Tribal College Collaborations" within *Beyond the Asterisk* (2013), and I am most intrigued by the section subtitled Barriers to Collaboration. Guillory presents the practice of mainstream institutions co-opting curriculum, courses, and programs, as well as partnering for the sole purpose of squiring grants (and taking a disproportionate share of the funds); and then he ties in the most insidious, underlying, passive-aggressive barrier—that I argue precludes and creates the other barriers—"the perception that TCU's are not as academically rigorous as or are of lesser quality than nontribal institutions" (p. 102). Boom! We are right back to the roots of the settler-colonial project's belief that Indigenous people are inferior. And not just are they—those *others*-- less than, but the dominant white structure is superior (especially the academics) and thus entitled to steal, oppress, discriminate, and otherwise disrespect Indigenous thought, work, and scholarship. Joshua A. Mihesuah (2004) states:

One of the most pressing issues for a Native student is identity. Many Natives, even those who are full blood, often have intense identity issues. Many live on a

reservation, but they often do not speak their language or know much about their traditions. Some Natives call themselves “traditional,” but they misunderstand the term and become their own worst enemies when they try to “out Indian” other Natives. (p. 194)

I, and my colleagues, see this on a regular basis. Not so much the “out Indianing” but the issue of identity and belonging, regardless of blood quantum or enrollment status. In the cohort model of NPP, students get to have the space and time to deeply acknowledge each other’s stories, and this builds identity confidence. Mihesuah (2004) asks: “How can any university ensure that its Indigenous student population will grow and be retained?” He answers with:

Academic programs that focus on helping Native students develop strong self-esteem and a sense of empowerment are crucial. Supporters of the status quo, with their inflexible course requirements and standards, often discourage Native students from pursuing interests that focus on their tribes. (p. 191)

I would add that status quo is the under and over-lying problem throughout institutions of higher education with regards to providing innovative, equitable, and culturally relevant learning opportunities for Indigenous (and all students who are outside of the mainstream white, middle-upper class student) students. Protecting status quo in the academy can be intentional as well as unintentional, but without authentic relationality, reciprocity, and accountability, the systems of the academy as set forth by the settler-colonial project will always be the status quo.

Leigh Patel (2017), who was introduced to the concept of settler colonialism by Eve Tuck, states the following in an interview on FreshEd podcast when discussing “hot points” on college campuses:

One that in many ways is related to the uprisings in the 1960s where college students are pushing back on diversity for only diversity’s sake. Students often are demanding more faculty of color, in part because they want to see leaders who reflect their histories and their experiences, but also because they want curriculum that doesn’t start with Sartre, doesn’t start with conquest of the West.

They want history that includes the history of their peoples and doesn’t begin that history of their peoples with colonial encounters.

What Patel is talking about is truth. Students are saturated in these technological, rapid-fire, immediate-information modern times with too much information, too little time to critically analyze and evaluate sources, and too many choices. Yet, they still seek the truth; they want to know when narrative fallacies and inaccurate facts are circulating, but they also want to find these truths out for themselves, and this is the crux of the modern thinking problem. I do not know the psychological reasoning for this phenomenon, but the societal masses tend not to practice due diligence in investigating the information that they readily digest; therefore, are apt to not only believe, but to spread mistruths—based in white supremacy, stereotypes, reliance on outdated information that fits their worldview, and so forth. Indigenous students are critical thinkers and demand multi-perspective explanations that are balanced through mind, body, heart, and spirit. Truth grows from relationships in time and place that give relevancy and authenticity to history.

Vine Deloria Jr. (2001) asserts that to understand Indian education and Indian knowledge, one must enter from the lens of metaphysics. He states: "The best description of Indian metaphysics was the realization that the world, and all its possible experiences, constituted a social reality, a fabric of life in which everything had the possibility of intimate knowing relationships because, ultimately, everything was related" (p. 2). Quite the opposite of western thought and learning, in which learning is separated into fields of study with established experts and theory-based education with little praxis. Deloria Jr. and Daniel Wildcat (2001) in *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* cleared the path toward what we know as Indigenous pedagogy, to think and practice Indian within educational systems. Wildcat (2001) explains:

In American Indian metaphysics, unlike the dominant system of Western metaphysics, awareness of one's self is the beginning of learning, and it certainly precedes the times most of us can think back to or remember...most of what we know is not a result of explicit pedagogy or teaching; it is learned through living. (p. 13)

I love this concept of most of what we know "is learned through living," for it is one of the core reasons that I believe retention rates of Native American, and other students of color, are so low compared with White students. It is unacceptable that we, in the academy, have not addressed this ongoing issue by asking what role identity politics plays in this issue. We have checkboxes on applications and demographic charts, state and national reports, all this data that provides resources to certain and specific areas of a public educational institution, but little real change occurs. The common refrain is "we don't have the funds" but what that in reality means is that there will not be designated

funds to areas with marginalized, underrepresented groups of students because it's not profitable or sustainable because 1) the identity politics of the time will change and a new group will be highlighted for need and 2) the system is large enough and complex enough that objectives and outcomes (or lack of) can be put into a narrative that belies the truth and 3) it takes more than money and non-human resources to create quality programs, services, and accountability.

I use myself as an example to illustrate how identity politics impacts the retention of Native American college-level students. I self-identify as Indigenous and cis-female, an educator, writer, mama, and status quo disruptor; however, what students see is a tall, red-brown skinned woman with tattoos; they hear a rapid-fire, code-switcher who vacillates between real talk and academic, professional talk as warranted; they feel heard, seen, and accepted because I look similar to them, I sound similar to them, and I listen and ask questions about them. I have similar lived experiences of many of the students I serve. I grew up in poverty, situated in physical, mental, and emotional abuse and violence, addiction, racism, and always underestimated, always self-reliant. I understand at my core that these factors and experiences shape who I am; and I can recognize others who share elements of my lived experiences. During college, sitting around sharing stories with my peers, I told a story that included this brief snippet about carrying around a plastic sandwich baggie full of change (gas money) and how my gas gauge didn't work so I'd have to rock my car (VW Beetle) and listen to the gas sloshing around because I didn't want it to be so low it'd freeze. We lived a land of freezing, snow-filled winters. My peers gasped, laughed, asked me to explain this minor (to me) part of the story—they were friendly but obviously astounded. Asked why I didn't just fill

my gas tank (I never had the money to fill my gas tank). These were not “my people.” I wasn’t offended, per se, just reminded once again that I was different because my lived experiences were atypical in these social and cultural circles. I didn’t feel as if I, as a person, did not belong but that they, my peers, wouldn’t belong in my (real) world. What I felt more than being a different ethnicity, culture, or skin-color, was their privilege and power derived from money—I was *other* due to classism.

Students are no different in this identity aspect; they find belonging and ease of connection when there is an authentic relatability which grows from common lived experiences more than a faculty “who looks like them”—this is supported by the lower importance of having an identified “Indigenous faculty” in the survey and collaborator responses in talking circles and interviews. I am curious if the responses would be different at younger ages, like for junior high or high school students, from a developmental viewpoint. Grande (2015) argues that:

Beyond an approach to schooling that underscores the political nature of education. American Indian students and educators also require a praxis that enables the dismantling of colonialist forces. They need a pedagogy that cultivates a sense of collective agency, both to curb the excesses of dominant power and to revitalize Indigenous communities. (p. 30)

Anytime there is an unequal exchange between parties in a capitalistic society, the result will be to create a reliance and codependent relationship. This is the hierarchy of power within the capitalist white supremacist system; whoever has the most resources or control over the resources controls the narrative. The origin and purpose of higher education in the U.S. is that the model was structured for wealthy and

predominately white, male students. This research does not provide, other than cursory, data or details of the history of the U.S. education system; suffice to say, this system was not created, nor delivered with reverence for Indigenous students. Through a lens of identity politics, Native Americans were schooled with one goal: assimilation, or as General Pratt (1892) is famous for saying: *kill an Indian, save a man*. Almost 150 years later, with the dedicated, diligent, and persistent work of the change-makers, social justice warriors, scholars, and educators, the river is changing course. Indigenous Peoples are claiming their rights to (higher) education as a form of resistance, revitalization, and reclaiming space and power.

For context, on Turtle Island, the first official institution of higher education was Harvard College, established in 1636 in the English colonies, and is indeed older than America. These colonial systems in the powerful form of educational institutions have been dominating the landscape almost since (permanent) contact. They have had a long time to develop and implement mechanisms of control—of ideas, of information, of access—and upending ideologies and the status quo is not going to be changed simply because it is good for humanity. Scholar and educator, John P. Hopkins (2020), calls for the understanding that:

Indigenizing education does not seek to teach students about Native peoples, cultures, and experiences as if they are objects of inquiry. Rather, indigenizing education a '(return) to the epistemological and ontological systems of a country's Indigenous peoples in order to shape educational systems and institutions in that place' (Pratt et al., 2018). (p 110)

Strong and purposeful Indigenous thinkers, believers, and doers are increasing within many fields of study across institutions of higher learning. We may not be showing up in the data, but we are in the classrooms, around the administrative tables, leading the work to not indigenize or decolonize or burn to the ground the existing dominant pedagogies and curriculum but to permanently, irrevocably install Indigenous pedagogies and curriculum (and faculty) into the same space; the aim is to take up space, not steal or destroy space. Robin Zape-Tah-Hol-Ah Minthorn (2022) talks about higher education and leadership as heartwork. She states that the purpose or center of this heartwork is to embed an Indigenous storywork approach in honoring Indigenous students' whole selves. At the crux of this manifestation in these relationalities are honoring Indigenous knowledge and epistemology that incorporates intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical ways of being throughout their experience...(p. 180). I appreciate Minthorn's attempts to open up the learning environment for Indigenous students to not only be aware of their Knowledge systems but to use them within the academic setting, and be valued. This is part of the undoing of settler-colonial mainstream education. Resistance can also be the act of replacing, which is what I would categorize the implementation of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

During a strategic planning meeting at my work, a self-identified White person argued that using the term "rigorous" was not using equitable language and could be offensive to marginalized students. I wholeheartedly disagreed and explained why: In most communities there are specific roles for members. There will be caretakers and givers, cooks, cleaners, medicine makers, teachers, students, storytellers, and so forth. The role of an educated person is to be fully educated of their ability and to share that

specific knowledge with the community. Rigor is necessary. It is an equity practice to provide the “marginalized” student with rigor and support. Rigor, in proper context and with cultural respect, in a higher education/academic setting indicates challenging, compelling, and creative work (learning) that results in new ideas or ways of thinking or depth of understanding. Rigor is what the student accomplishes in their learning, not the quantity of the work. The reason I share this anecdote is to demonstrate that identity politics infiltrate all academic spaces, even if unintentional. This colleague did not realize that comment was offensive to me, a person in that “marginalized” identity category, teaching marginalized students. The following storywork explores the reality that many marginalized, underrepresented Indigenous students experience within the education systems and structures.

### **Collaborator Journeys in education**

**S.L.:** Growing up in my tribal community didn't exactly set me up for an easy or comfortable path to higher education. Because of challenges I met around opportunity and accessibility I never imagined I'd be a college graduate. As an alternative high school dropout and teen runaway, higher education did not feel like something I'd ever get the chance to experience. I attempted community college several times as a young adult after receiving my GED but failed each time. The spaces I tried to occupy in higher education often felt isolating due to my background, and the lack of other Native peers and instructors. When I finally arrived at The Institute of American Indian Arts it was later in life, when I was in my mid-twenties. Being able to be in classrooms with mostly Native peers and

Native instructors created the community I desperately required in order to succeed. I believe that my success during both my undergrad and my MFA program was absolutely because I was able to attend a Native program with a strong commitment to the success of its students. I was finally in a classroom environment free of racism, or harmful and exclusionary approaches. Being able to be surrounded by other Native scholars created a space I could thrive in, and was excited to learn in. Because of a program that focused on Native students' needs and voices I was able to go from an alternative high school dropout, to a twice Valedictorian and double MFA recipient. Both are experiences I never thought possible when I was navigating nonnative institutions.

**Me & C.B.:**

When I was in graduate school, I knew that I wanted to continue teaching but at a college/university level. I also only knew white faculty (primarily male) except for a friend who taught college Spanish and was female and Mexicana. I knew this woman at my children's elementary school was Native (I assumed this, yes, based on physicality and our chin nods to one another) and faculty at a community college; but I had never spoken to her (except non-verbally/chin nod). In any other social situation, especially if I was asking a favor or had a need, I would never ever be so bold as to reach out and grab this woman's arm as we were on the stairs of the school. I don't know what possessed me to do this, yet my gratitude is endless. We have been sister educators, sister writers, sister supporters ever since. The point is, neither of us had met a kindred spirit, a Native woman humanities teacher who shared the same hopes and dreams for

Indigeneity in higher education. I had one Native teacher during my undergraduate and graduate studies. He was Zuni, an elder, and worked in the cultural anthropology field (my minor in undergrad). He told me every single time we met (I was doing a special project with him) that “you need to keep going and do this for our people.” I had no idea what he was talking about, then. I do now. I have tried to locate him over the years and have never found even a trace of where he ended up. So until I connected with C.B., I didn’t realize how much I missed seeing myself, my worldview, and my future reflected back.

**Ash**, age 26, enrolled Makah Indian Nation citizen identifies as a cis-bi-woman, Makah Native and white. Interviewed in-person on July 13 and 14, 2023. We discussed the working definition of identity politics. Reading the dictionary definition and laughing at how on the surface, hearing the words identity politics immediately conjures images of Natives during AIM, or Standing Rock, or other protests for Indigenous rights. The term doesn’t directly hit the nail of federally recognized tribally enrolled citizen, or perhaps it’s because we aren’t accustomed to carrying around a hammer.

**Ash:**

Before the definition, I understood identity politics as the implications behind the identities you resonate with, and as other people’s perception of your identity.

After talking about the definition, I would say identity politics is how you align yourself politically based on your identities. (2023)

Ash's journey through higher education began after high school (2015) and attending a local community college where she dropped out the second quarter because of "no family support." She earned her two-year associate degree, a direct transfer degree, in 2021. She worked at the community college's Longhouse as a student and heard about the Native Pathways Program at the Evergreen State College from an alum of the program. "I wanted to move away from home, and the tuition was affordable compared to other 4-year institutions in the state, plus NPP was an Indigenous focused program so I applied and was accepted." Ash graduated with a BA emphasizing Interdisciplinary Indigenous and Native American Studies in 2023.

We continued the semi-formal interview, sitting outside after a full day out in the extraordinarily gorgeous Quileute Nation territory.

*Does identifying as Indigenous impact your experiences in higher education?*

**Ash:**

At Peninsula Community College, in a social science required class, I had a white male professor (probably in his 60s) teach the text, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (1997) by Jared Diamond. The professor told the class, almost verbatim, that if Europeans hadn't had weapons and invaded, Indians would have died off anyway from diseases and killing each other. I filed a complaint, but nothing happened because I was told he was 'tenured.' I withdrew from the class. Shortly after this incident, I was asked by the college to provide input on an Equity Committee. The committee was brainstorming ideas of what and how they could require staff and faculty to attend

diversity trainings. I don't know what ever came of it. My senior year of high school, in the same community, I felt isolated and had no sense of belonging; even the Native Club was not welcoming. I was the only one at graduation to wear a cedar graduation cap.

I hoped it would be different at Evergreen and in NPP. NPP was welcoming to all Indigenous students, and I felt for the first time like I fit in and belonged. The campus, as a whole though—I definitely don't feel like we fit in by the way we are treated as other or tokenized for marketing ops.

*What do you think is the most important in higher education—Indigenous faculty, curriculum content, or pedagogy?*

**Ash:**

The education system is dominated by the western lens, so it is important to have both western and Indigenous content to compare and contrast ways of thinking. I'd prefer Indigenous faculty, but a non-Native faculty can still approach the curriculum from an Indigenous lens and connect with the students. I believe all these areas are impactful and important for Indigenous students. I think the community aspect is the most important though. At NPP we are seen as individuals and valued for what we collectively bring into the community. I always felt invisible before in school. Learning in a community environment, with other Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) students is empowering for me, as an Indigenous person and as a scholar.

*How does Indigenous identity impact students in higher education?*

**Ash:**

We have specific scholarships that we can apply for, although that may change with the anti-affirmative action laws. There are more downfalls to being Indigenous though, such as insensitive and ignorant professors, feeling isolated, financial aid not understanding tribal aid (if a student receives it), and the stereotypes that we are all dead or rich off the government. Oh, and asked to defend or explain Native Americans and culture because you are usually the only Native in the class. People have the assumption that all Natives have the same cultural practices, eat the same foods, have the same regalia (many people still call regalia costumes), and have the same art. Being tokenized is never a good feeling.

The collaborator stories around higher education, and education in general, speak to the Western cloak of invisibility that perpetuates Indigenous stereotypes, one-sided, inaccurate historical narratives, and fosters feelings of impostor syndrome, guilt, and not belonging. Not belonging is the internal force and only partially reliant on community acceptance; I understand this to be true by following the silken threads of the stories—the center is self, and although the process of belonging is built upon community and external perspectives, the centering and de-centering of identity happen within the self. Marie Battiste (2014) declares that “Eurocentric education and political

systems and their assimilation processes have severely eroded and damaged Indigenous knowledge...Indigenous knowledge is derived from Indigenous peoples” (p.497,499). I would argue that as an effect of the ongoing assimilation practices and policies manifested from settler-colonialism, there arises a fissure in *how* to return to Indigenous knowledge, as the transmission of culture was broken. Furthermore, I question if it is a return or an uncovering. Knowledge can be buried for safe-keeping, as any group of people are attacked for their ways of being understood. Battiste contends that it is not up to the education system to teach Indigenous knowledge and her main reason is because “Indigenous knowledge is diverse and must be learned in the similar diverse and meaningful ways that the people have learned it for it to have continuing vitality and meaning” (p.501). I acknowledge that my bias for Indigenous scholarship through higher education is present when I say that it is vital to learn cultural knowledge from the cultural keepers and teachers of individual tribes (if one is of that tribe, or invited to learn); however, I also believe that Native American and Indigenous studies taught “right” at the higher ed level, provide the broad pre-colonial and settler-colonial historical narratives that situate Indigenous leadership (and peoples) on a future journey of more than survival. I consider higher education as *one* tool, not the only or best tool for empowering and promoting Indigeneity.

### **Closing Reflections**

Systems and structures are put in place and gain popular dominion and traction either to maintain, threaten, or protect status quo; these dominant white stream systems and structures are visible and invisible, but ever-present throughout academia. Change

disrupts status quo stakeholders, especially their pocketbooks or livelihoods. Academia historically, and currently, serves the dominant culture at a price-point that is unattainable for many; scholarship students, first gen students, and any marginalized, politicized identity group of students is at a serious and costly disadvantage in this system where pervasive racism, bigotry, targeting, sabotage, and white guilt, savior-complex (intentional or not) exist. Indigenous empowerment in and through education is gaining traction in the political and social milieu. We are not simplifying the equation to install our presence within the academy; we are getting rid of the corrosive, detrimental voices and practices of denial to reclaim our rightful place—wherever we choose to be.

I love learning, and I love teaching (that's also how I learn). I do not love but can tolerate as a means to an end bureaucratic bluster, ego-driven ignoramuses, or identity politics that have become so intertwined in the daily life that sometimes you forget to smack it down, or you are too exhausted and let *just this one* get away. This is the essence of identity politics in the academy. It's always a teaching game and you are forever the teacher. As an Indigenous woman, tattooed, and brown-skinned, identity politics forms stereotypes, projections, fear, and a desire to circumnavigate around me—I am rarely questioned about tribal enrollment or belonging and am overlooked for public-facing committee or external work but chosen for every internal committee that needs an Indigenous, female (probably any female of color to be honest).

**CHAPTER EIGHT | UNSETTLING****To Live in the Borderlands**

To live in the borderlands means you  
are neither *hispana india negra espanola*  
*ni gabacha, eres mestiza, mulata*, half-breed  
caught in the crossfire between camps  
while carrying all five races on your back  
not knowing which side to turn to, run from;

To live in the Borderlands means knowing  
that the *india* in you, betrayed for 500 years,  
is no longer speaking to you,  
the *mexicanas* call you *rajetas*,  
that denying the Anglo inside you  
is as bad as having denied the Indian or Black;

*Cuando vives en la frontera*  
people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,  
you're a *burra, buey*, scapegoat,  
forerunner of a new race,

half and half--both woman and man, neither--  
a new gender;

To live in the Borderlands means to  
put *chile* in the borscht,  
eat whole wheat *tortillas*,  
speak Tex-Mex with a Brooklyn accent;  
be stopped by *la migra* at the border checkpoints;

Living in the Borderlands means you fight hard to  
resist the gold elixir beckoning from the bottle,  
the pull of the gun barrel,  
the rope crushing the hollow of your throat;

In the Borderlands  
you are the battleground  
where enemies are kin to each other;  
you are at home, a stranger,  
the border disputes have been settled  
the volley of shots have scattered the truce  
you are wounded, lost in action  
dead, fighting back;

To live in the Borderlands means  
the mill with the razor white teeth wants to shred off  
your olive-red skin, crush out the kernel, your heart  
pound you pinch you roll you out  
smelling like white bread but dead;

To survive the Borderlands  
you must live *sin fronteras*  
be a crossroads. (Anzaldua, 2004, p. 216-217)

The borderlands in this poem are both metaphorical and concrete. Borderlands and crossroads fit beautifully into my imagined and lived worlds. I come from, on my paternal grandmother's lineage, the legit borderlands between the Mexican state of Chihuahua and the state of Texas; I was born a couple of hours from the borderlands between NW Mexico and California; and being mixed, I am always at a crossroads. After half a century, I am comfortable in this kind of existence. It keeps me alert and curious and holds that chip on my shoulder firmly in place. That's why I prefer the overarching term of Indigenous as an identifying label, explanation, reason. A conversation between Taiaiake Alfred (2009) (Kahnawake Mohawk) and Atsenhaienton (Kanien'kehaka and member of the bear clan). Alfred asks if there is something more fundamental to being indigenous than similarities in social structures, distributing wealth, making decisions, and Atsenhaienton responds:

What's fundamental about being indigenous, and is common among us, is the relationship to the land—indigenous people have a long association with the land we are occupying. Some people, of course, have been “transmigrated” or forced to migrate to other areas, but they still have a strong attachment to the land. Also, we don't have a definition for being indigenous: We believe in group self-definition. Peoples can identify for themselves that they are, and other indigenous groups will recognize who is indigenous. That's how we do it. You yourself are an indigenous person, and other people recognize you as being indigenous; that's what makes you indigenous. (p. 136)

The following are written answers by anonymous self-identified Native students that I believe add voice to what has been expressed throughout this research project on many levels by many different people: Indigenous identity is (maybe not equal parts) how you identify yourself and how your community recognizes you, but also includes other facets of a person's identity. There is a totality, a full circle concept of identity that has arisen from the data collected and doesn't fit into the Western binary of one or the other.

There were five questions, and these were handwritten surveys, thus I only reported on what I could explicitly and without question read. The responses are translated verbatim.

***# 1 what does identity politics mean to you?***

- Not so much politics but social justice issues
- social issues and how they interact with identity and related to intersectionality

- identity politics is the discourse and politics colonization of a group. This may involve the rights of this group, statistical marginalization, and stereotyping of this group. Examples are the disabled LGBTQ 2 people of color Jewish et cetera.

***# 2 after reading the western dictionary definition does your perspective change how or why?***

- More or less, I am thinking the western definition addresses an individual movement and I don't it doesn't really change any of my own perspectives.
- I guess the western definition turns it into more of an individual action, as opposed to the broader phenomenon. It doesn't really change my perspective, I guess.
- No, as the western dictionary comes from the source that causes most identity politics to begin with.

***# 3 what is your experience within your identity framework and higher education?***

- My experience within my identity framework and higher education is or has changed because it is always being talked about.
- My identity framework is malleable and ever changing, it is in constant conversation with the curriculum in my program.
- I find myself advocating strongly not just for my identity but other identities as well. As a disabled trans student of color living under the poverty line I have to work harder in every aspect of my life than my peers to receive an education and respect within education higher education.

***#4 do you feel or believe there is a relationship between identity politics and higher education?***

- Yes, there is a relationship between all three.
- Definitely I guess I don't know the history of the term, but I would assume it was forged in higher education settings not the idea but the terminology. Either way identity politics enters into almost every discussion especially in liberal arts environments
- Always. We, marginalized students, constantly have to self-advocate against bias and misinformation even being taught and resources due to our identities.

***#5 does identity politics allow for change and fluidity of culture and identity?***

- Not in my experience.
- I have had or witnessed only negative interactions when identity politics is at the forefront of discourse. What I have noticed is people taking a very dogmatic approach to identity politics and imposing a social hierarchy on various groups in order to identify who is “most oppressed.” Identity politics relies on the enforcement of cultural stereotypes, or for the mainstream underlying beliefs regarding race, sex, class to remain static. It is a reactionary to the social constructs upheld through oppression and it requires you to self-identify with roles that are formed out of patriarchy colonization heterosexism racism et cetera. These rules function differently depending on the context and the goals, and the goal posts are ever shifting and impossible to define. Identity politics to me seems fragile, divisive, and inflexible.

- A loaded question. It can. However, it can also cause more harm to our communities if bigots are at the table instead of us the marginalized, being listened to on our own needs. The politicalization of trans identity from sis politics has proven to be deadly for us. The politicalization of people of color identity from whites has proven to be deadly for us. When we are leading and being listened to, it is when our liberation comes.
- I have not yet to experience identity politics allowing for change and fluidity of culture and identity however I've had lots of negatives and experiences with identity politics.

These collaborator voices allow for the spectrum of perspectives and demonstrated understandings of theoretical components of identity politics and the praxis of identity politics, in and out of the higher education institution. I would posit that within the responses, the dynamic of social, cultural, and political layers of the individual are apparent and obvious to the degree that self-identity was presented. The responses, as well as the scholarly work evaluated in this research project, clearly find that identity politics can cause harm, sometimes intentionally and without remorse. The evidence that identity politics divides people even from the same group and is viewed primarily as a negative (experience with and concept of) has shown up throughout the research findings. It is also clear to me that there are two ways of responding—from an individual and internal POV and a bigger picture, inclusive-community POV.

Exclusionary frameworks or viewpoints have not been revealed in the responses and stories of the research collaborators.

Philip J. Deloria (1998) says, “There was, quite simply, no way to conceive an American identity without Indians. At the same time, there was no way to make a complete identity while they remained” (p. 37). This feels relevant when considering the heightened awareness of being other and separate from the mainstream, yet this otherness worn as an identity blanket also creates who the dominant culture (people) are. Mainstream, white-dominant culture would not be if identity politics worked toward uniting and strengthening “other” groups, rather than dividing and fracturing them.

### **Disruption & De-centering**

Across various social media accounts for social justice movements there is a sentiment that identity politics can create a false or inauthentic rendering of culture because it can require that oppressed groups act a certain way, or practice their culture in a visible, performative manner, to keep their status afforded through the mechanism of identity politics. Identity politics is unsettling and often “...is often associated with the promotion of tokenized personalities rather than on the representation and advancement of oppressed communities within society...., it reinforces a populism that serves white supremacy and patriarchy” (Litvin, 2018).

The continual state of fight or flight, of unsettled issues, and of unsettling narratives must be attended to from the intergenerational and historical trauma work. I am not saying anyone needs to work through the trauma; I am calling for non-Indigenous persons to process through the stages of the trauma to comprehend the gravity and expanse of the issues that impact Indigenous communities. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (2013) presented “American Indian Women Warriors: Historical

Trauma and Cultural Perspectives,” providing this (general) cultural background to understanding historical trauma:

- Impairment of traditional gender roles and relationships; in many tribes, women and children are sacred and were never the property of men
  - Women held special sacredness and spiritual powers (women’s societies as well as men’s) and political power and influence
  - Men lost traditional roles as warriors and protectors to varying degrees – disarmament, massacres, disruption of hunting cultures, etc.
  - Although there have been “warrior” women traditionally in some tribes, it was not the norm; however, women always had strength and protected the family
  - Both lost traditional parenting roles under the early boarding school system

Social progress means that we scrutinize and prioritize, then act upon the injustices against Indigenous ways of life; collectively and in unity we challenge the historiography and wrongdoings of settler-colonialism. Can this ever be accomplished? I contend that some memories, experiences, and losses are never healed, because healing implies that a person is not healthy to begin with, and I find this explanation for the impacts of settler-colonialism to be missing the ingredient of collective healing of and from the systems and structures that are in place to continually disrupt the well-being of Indigenous (and all by proxy) humans. Matika Wilbur, a visual storyteller from the Swinomish and Tulalip tribes, referencing Native American genocide, says that “Native America might always feel the grief from that loss because colonial disruption is still here and its violence permeates every aspect of American culture and politics”

(2018, p. 25). Grief is part of being healthy, and healing, if we situate healing as an ongoing process and a way of life.

Mark Trahant (2018) wrote an essay called “The Disruption of White Supremacy: Why Colonialism is Failing Right on Time,” and proposed that colonial hegemony, from a historical standpoint, is but a short amount of time in the bigger picture. I agree that a few hundred years is but a blip in the context of historical time as we understand it, from a Western perspective of linear time, and that time cannot erase the legacy of colonial hegemony. Trahant states that “disruption” is how Indigenous people can “free ourselves from the economic, racial, and cultural oppression that is colonialism’s legacy.” He posits that disruption can explain “the sudden—and not-so-sudden shifts in history—in a way that ‘decolonization’ alone does not” (p. 20). He explores this idea further by articulating the idea that at the core, “colonialism, manifest destiny, and hegemony largely chronicle the push and pull between the rich and the poor. ‘Disruption,’ on the other hand, does not have an ideology. It’s simply a sudden and dramatic shift from what was considered the norm” (p. 22). His main point is that we are all experiencing a climate crisis and for humanity to survive, colonialism must be disrupted, or ended, as “the colonial system, which is white-male-centric, is incapable of the leadership we need for our species to confront climate change” (p. 23). This concern and evaluation of white-supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism is shared by the research collaborator’s stories presented in this project. The idea expressed being that identity politics, in current understanding and usage, is fracturing Indigenous people and shifting the focus away from the ultimate survival of our world, our planet. This is not ignoring or denying the importance of, or the power that could be derived from, identity

politics for Indigenous people, but a call to frame identity politics in an Indigenous way that shifts the power paradigm from settler-colonial ideologies and systems to Indigenous environment and people-based ideologies and systems that prioritize Relationality and Reciprocity between all living things.

This crisis we are experiencing can be rectified "...while Indian people have lived out a collection of historical nightmares in the material world, they have also haunted a long night of American dreams. As many native people have observed, to be American is to be unfinished" (Deloria, 1998, p. 191). Moving forward with Indigenous intentions and ancestral memory, the unfinished business of being American or any settler-colonial power, will be de-centered at least and finished at best.

Elizabeth Archuleta (2006) posits that

Research methods are socially constructed, and communities decide what constitutes knowledge. Therefore, Indigenous women should not accept the notion that our rhetorical practices do not constitute sites of knowledge production or that we cannot use our own words and experiences to reconceptualize the processes and epistemological bases of our research to create an Indigenous women's feminist theory...What are Indigenous women claiming as different from existing paradigms? An examination of Indigenous women's primary rhetorical practices demonstrates that communication and sharing through writing constitutes an important location where Indigenous women theorize our lives, a claim that raises additional questions. (p. 88-89)

This is an ongoing de-settling of the mainstream dominant culture in academia. I argue that story-work and Indigenous Feminisms are not about de-colonizing (in the western

way of knowing and using this concept) or carving out a place in the academy; instead, this way of being and knowing has always been and exists outside settler-colonialism. Therefore, it does not need to be a de-colonization project, per se, because it is decolonization in the essence of simply existing. Furthermore, asserting the role of Indigenous feminists in the mainstream academy is not an act of resistance or revitalization because that presupposes the Indigenous community needs the acceptance and acknowledgment of the mainstream academic culture when scholarly work is being done. The work *is* happening, regardless of settler-colonial ideologies and systems of oppression.

Beth Brant sagely stated: "Everything we write will be used against us" (1994, p. 53). The tenuous nature of the relationship between any colonizer-nation and original-nation(s), if examined through the distinct ideologies that guide each nation, illustrates the accommodation afforded to the dominant (for this case, the U.S. federal government) ideology under which the colonized others can never fully represent themselves (or their tribes/nations) without the ever-present threat of elimination. There is no such thing as full autonomy in this scenario. Leading me to concur with Brant's sentiment above, indeed, everything will be held against us. Tribal sovereignty will be re-situated by the dominant settler-colonial power as a tool us against tribes and Indigenous people. The narratives will be presented that nobody knows who authentically Indigenous and that decolonization means getting something for free or taking away something from the dominant culture. It will not matter if Natives were trying to protect tribal sovereignty by uncovering and exposing "fake Indians," nor if indigenizing the academy is for the better for all--the end result is that it will be framed

as identity politics to demonstrate how Natives don't even know who is Native and who is not. Marginalized and oppressed groups calling each other out, lateral violence, and revealing only the narratives that support the dominant society's ideology are settler-colonization's greatest weapon; the hands of the perpetrator never even get dirty. Is this a subversive form of self-sabotage? I do not have the answers, but I give you, revolutionary and righteous readers, this poem from Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok):

### **LONG DIVISION: A TRIBAL HISTORY**

Our skin loosely lies  
across grass borders;  
stones loading up  
are loaded down with placement sticks.  
a great tearing  
and appearance of holes.  
We are bought and divided  
into clay pots; we die  
on granite scaffolding  
on the shape of the Sierras  
and lie down with lips open  
thrusting songs on the world.  
Who are we and do we  
still live? The doctor,  
asleep, says no.

So outside of eternity  
we struggle until our blood  
has spread off our bodies  
and frayed the sunset edges.  
It's our blood that gives you  
those southwestern skies.  
Year after year we give,  
harpooned with hope, only to fall  
bouncing through the canyons,  
our songs decreasing  
with distance.  
I suckle coyotes  
and grieve. (1992, p. 18)

### ***Symbolism vs. Reality***

In America, the land of the brave and free, Indians are the symbol of wildness and address the concept of taming; like one would tame a wild animal, a savage but beautiful creature to be tamed, thus saving. Tame could also symbolize civilized; to tame a thing is to civilize a thing, or to be civilized is to be tame(d). We can dance around the semantics and metaphors and symbolic imagery forever and a day. However, the reality of this symbolic caricature and misrepresentation that is ever-present in many minds can be fought—with humor. That's the reality that saves Indigenous people from giving up, giving in: humor. LeAnne Howe in an essay she

wrote for the Native Voices anthology (2019), has a section sub-titled *Jacked Conflicts* that illustrates this humor reality that I speak of, most perfectly when responding to this description of conflict by Canadian author and literary critic Douglas Glover “is any relationship of opposition”:

Here, the writer in my head types, “No shit, Kimosabe, whites and Indians are deadlocked in opposition.” The other me agrees, but tries a more diplomatic approach. “American Indians have had a long and difficult relationship with non-Indians because of land theft, removal, and genocide carried out at the point of a gun. It should come as no surprise that my fiction, creative non-fiction, and poetry are filled with episodes of murders, warfare, and rape: punctuated by rapid gunfire.” Am I a writer with a violent agenda, or just telling the truth as I know it? (p.158)

Maybe this isn’t even humorous, but to me, it tells a heartbreaking truth and weaves in just enough (humor?) to let me breathe while digesting the narrative. She continues by likening Indian Territory to:

One giant reservation with all the Indians in the world squeezed into one place. Perhaps the thinking was that Natives from different tribes would kill one another because they were wild Indians and traumatized from walking 10,000 miles. (It wasn’t 10,000 miles.) (p.160).

Is Howe an unreliable narrator? Does this even exist for Natives with their vast tribalographies and mythologies and oral stories told from generation to generation? Am I a reliable narrator? Is the government? Or is it more appropriate to ask how the

ancestors will tell us who belongs and who doesn't? Or when will they tell us to fight harder or stop fighting and tend to our own?

Seriously, if all the Natives were displaced and removed to one giant reservation, what would Indian Country look like today? Would Natives be bona fide members of Giant Reservation Nation? Would it be a 1/4 of Turtle Island? 1/8 or 1/16? Would it be full-blood 4/4 and have taken back the homelands? How many more Natives would there be now? Would they be citizens of separate tribes or one big tribe or would they be the \_\_\_\_\_ people, the \_\_\_\_\_ people and so forth? The actual decisions regarding tribal citizenship or membership are not solely at the discretion of the tribes, regardless of the sovereign rights of nations to determine their own membership guidelines and practices. For example, on the BIA governmental website, it states that:

as foreign powers' presence expanded and with the establishment and growth of the United States, tribal populations dropped dramatically and tribal sovereignty gradually eroded. While tribal sovereignty is limited today by the United States under treaties, acts of Congress, Executive Orders, federal administrative agreements and court decisions, what remains is nevertheless protected and maintained by the federally recognized tribes against further encroachment by other sovereigns, such as the states. Tribal sovereignty ensures that any decisions about the tribes with regard to their property and citizens are made with their participation and consent. (2017)

After carefully analyzing the passage, it is clear that the federally recognized tribes in the U.S. have a limited sovereignty, and the federal government has the ultimate power over them. Read again the last part that states, "Tribal sovereignty ensures that any

decisions about the tribes with regard to their **property** and **citizens are made with their participation and consent.**” Participation and consent do not equate to autonomy and are not indicative of tribal control—tribes can participate, and decisions won’t be made without the tribe’s consent—legally, politically this is considered *better than nothing*.

The creation of membership by the over-ruling culture, regardless of sovereign rights of nations to determine their own membership guidelines and practices, is often ignored in modern times. For example, on the BIA governmental website, it states that “as foreign powers’ presence expanded and with the establishment and growth of the United States, tribal populations dropped dramatically, and tribal sovereignty gradually eroded. While tribal sovereignty is limited today by the United States under treaties, acts of Congress, Executive Orders, federal administrative agreements, and court decisions, what remains is nevertheless protected and maintained by the federally recognized tribes against further encroachment by other sovereigns, such as the states. Tribal sovereignty ensures that any decisions about the tribes with regard to their property and citizens are made with their participation and consent” (2017). It is clear that the federally recognized tribes in the U.S. have a limited sovereignty, and the federal government has the ultimate power.

The Doctrine of Discovery, as applied to the Americas, is founded on the principle of terra nullius--that is that the land “discovered” was empty land, as in the indigenous peoples that did indeed occupy the so-called empty land were nothing. “It is well settled and clear that Settler States such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand would never voluntarily recognize Indigenous Sovereignty” (Mann,

2013). When policies and practices of eradication and termination didn't work, assimilation was the tool of choice, through relocation and destruction of culture. Assimilation to the dominant culture is the best way to "settle" or colonize a land. The controversy of who is and who is not indigenous, across borders, oceans, and nations, when viewed through the lens of capitalism and global economics, plays directly into the hands (and bank accounts) of the colonizers. "How tribes define themselves depends greatly on the political and economic needs of the tribe..." (Metcalf, 2002, p. 213). This reality plays into the uses of blood quantum for tribal enrollment from a socio-economic perspective. Existing federally recognized tribes must balance the overall tribal needs with regards to resources and economic needs when considering enrollment growth. This begs the question: What is the best Indigenous approach to tribal identity and enrollment? As sovereign nations, individual tribes possess the right to determine their own membership. Metcalf (2002) explains the complexities of identity from a political (tribal) and social (individual) perspective this way:

There is, of course, a significant difference between claiming to be an Indian and claiming tribal membership. Individuals presumably possess inalienable rights of self-identification in the pursuit of personal liberty. Problems arise, however, when the rights of individuals intrude into the prerogatives of groups with special rights in society, such as federally recognized Indian tribes. (p. 215)

I have noticed a pattern in the past decade in that tribal governments have typically followed and mirrored the federal government, in terms of social norms and operating moral structures. I have not researched this to the extent that I agree or disagree except to state that it resonates a type of rationality for why tribes have yet to find their way

back to Indigenous ways of being in community. The other rationale is that social constructs such as governments and even culture are not static, but fluid and changing. With globalization and social media, we have access to observe indigenous cultural identity and practices such as the Māori's haka--traditional war dance--that was performed and filmed in solidarity with the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline and went viral over the inter-webs. Te Hamua Nikora, co-founder of the group Haka with Standing Rock, told Radio New Zealand: "When one group of relations is being hurt, (abused), being bullied, being ripped off, we all feel that, especially us as Māori, we are very much a leader to the indigenous people" (Wanshel, 2016, par. 4). This act of solidarity encourages the question of Indigenous identity and belonging--the who is and who is not--because as Nikora implies, Indigenous is Indigenous and all Indigenous peoples should carry the fight for sovereignty and humanity. To base Indigenous belonging and identity on pseudo-science blood quantum or settler colonialist ideologies and legislation is to forget our ancestors' survival skills and allows for the continual subjugation of all Indigenous Peoples.

The entirety of Tommy Orange's fictional first novel, *There There* (2018) was unsettling the first, second, and third time I read it, and at the same time inspiring and rejuvenating. In the Prologue of the complex and compelling multi-generational story of urban Indians, identity crises, past and modern-day tragedies, and lives lived the best they could be, Orange briefly and powerfully outlines the historical periods and events that connect to the head motif and symbolism of the "Indian head." Most Americans see the "Indian head" on the nickel, on film and in print, in advertising and as logos without

understanding the significance and gravity behind this literal and metaphorical head, Indian head.

Orange relays that when Metacomet (King Philip) who was Chief Massasoit of the Wampanoags' son, was killed in the first Indian War in 1676, his body was quartered and his severed head was put in a jar, sold to the Plymouth Colony for 30 shillings, and displayed for over twenty-five years. His head. A human head.

More Indian heads—Pequot this time—were severed from their bodies and kicked through the streets of the Massachusetts Bay colony after an estimated 400-700 hundred Pequots were murdered during their Green Corn Dance ceremony in 1637. Surprise attacked and murdered, and it was declared a victory. The governor declared a feast celebrating the annihilation of the Pequot as “thanksgiving” and yes, this is what is celebrated as a national holiday. As if Columbus Day wasn’t enough of a reminder of the place and power of Indigenous people. The more modern day “Indian head” could be viewed in the 1970s with the “Indian head test pattern” that was created in 1939 by an unknown artist and broadcasted on everyone’s television at the end of programming for the day. Let’s ponder this fiction that speaks volumes and resonates a truth that is inescapable: “They took everything and ground it down to dust as fine as gunpowder, they fired their guns into the air in victory and the strays flew out into the nothingness of histories written wrong and meant to be forgotten” (Orange, 2018, p. 10). The symbol of the “Indian Head” represented across 300 years was one of warning and victory (think of the saying, *heads are gonna roll*). On the surface, the head represents a type of recognition that isn’t positive or negative until social and political messages are attached, whether implied or explicit. Upon critical analysis, the motif of *the* head, the

Native American head, for Indigenous people demonstrates gross generalization, dispossession, and ultimate betrayal--losing one's head, literally and figuratively.

In more modern times, the "Crying Indian" who was in fact not an Indian at all but Iron Eyes Cody, an Italian actor, portrayed *the* Indian with a tear rolling down his (high boned) cheeks because of litter --a public service announcement with a real-life braids, buckskin, canoe, drumming, darkened complexion, deep voice, and stoic stare down. This was in the early 1970s so for time and place context, it wasn't commonplace to see any Indians on the big (or little) screen unless they were in cowboy westerns, as the sidekick, the bad guy, or the wild woman who needed to be saved (civilized), and not every household had a television. So as a child, living in a primarily white rural neighborhood with my white mama and siblings, I saw killers, thieves, and crybabies representing Indigenous males and for female representation, I had Pocahontas (sweet and sexy) and Sacajawea (sweet and hard-working) as helpers (servants) to men. This was the 1970s and 80s on the west coast of Turtle Island and my experiences and memories of self and identity at that time.

People tend to forget the implications and detrimental underpinnings once something has been established as symbolic and becomes iconic. For instance, it took decades for the readily offensive Indian sports mascots to be removed, and that particular fight is ongoing with Native people on both "sides" of the issue. I find a vast difference of opinions between the academic and/or intellectualizing of issues such as misrepresentation and inaccurate Indigenous symbolism (that is often culturally appropriated) and the everyday existing realms. I reiterate this point because not all Natives believe, feel, think, or behave the same, and it is often viewed as a weak point

in Native voices of dissent (or approval) that those voices are not a majority, just the loudest.

### **Closing Reflections**

Identity on its own merits, values, and interpretations somehow becomes everyone's business, as if anyone is entitled to an opinion, a judgement...Identity politics arguable on its face, does not need to manifest in further or ongoing oppressive acts toward the identified group of people, yet as the research explores and examines, it—identity politics for Indigenous Americans (and many folks will not appreciate or approve of this term/label) tends toward reinforcing settler colonial racism, separatism, eradication white supremacy, androcracy, and a lack of authentic self, or community, determination. The fight continues within and outside of Indigenous communities, the ever-revolving politics of tribal councils and governments – where are the council of grandmothers now?

I've heard that optimism is a political act. I identify myself as an optimist-realist that is political because I must be. I cannot exist in today's world as a woman, a mother, an Indigenous educator, scholar, and creative without constant critical inquiry and thinking. I agree with *Writing as Witness* author Beth Brant (1993), when she says, "As an indigenous writer, I feel that the gift of writing and the *privilege* of writing holds a responsibility to be a witness to my people. To be a witness of the natural world, ... to the sometimes unbearable circumstances of our lives" (p. 70). By witnessing and participating in the world around me, I am a like a river—consistent, yet never the same. Blood memory flows in me.

Identity and politics is upon the future seven generations. With insight, humor, and deep references to pop culture, Tayi Tibble (Maori) and her on-point poem about the many tentacles of identity politics:

***Identity Politics***

I buy a Mana Party T-shirt from AliExpress,  
\$9.99 free shipping via standard post.  
Estimated arrival 14-13 working days.  
Tracking unavailable via DSL. Asian size XXL.  
I wear it as a dress with thigh-high vinyl boots  
and fishnets. I post a picture to Instagram.  
Am I navigating correctly? Tell me,  
which stars were my ancestors looking at?  
And which ones burnt the black of searching irises  
and reflected something genuine back? I look to  
Rihanna and Kim Kardashian shimmering in  
Swarovski crystals. Make my eyes glow with seeing.  
I am inhaling long white clouds and I see  
rivers of milk running towards orange oceans of  
sunlit honey. Tell me, am I navigating correctly?  
I want to spend my money on something bourgie,  
like custom-made pounamu hoop earrings. I want to

make them myself but my line doesn't trace back  
to the beauties in the south making amulets  
with elegant fingers. I go back into blackness,  
I go back and fill in the gaps, searching through archives  
of advertisements: Welcome to the Wonderland  
of the South Pacific. Tiki bars, traffic-light cocktails &  
paper umbrellas. Tell me, am I navigating correctly?  
Steering through the storm drunk & wet-faced  
waking up to the taste of hangover, a dry mouth, a strange bed,  
shirt above my head is the flag fluttering over everything.  
What were we celebrating? The 6th of February is the anniversary  
of the greatest failed marriage this nation has ever seen.  
In America, couples have divorce parties. We always arrive  
fashionably late. Tell me, am I navigating correctly? The sea  
our ancestors traversed stretches out farther than the stars. (2018)

My hands are raised to everyone "navigating" their way through this world.

**SECTION IV: North & Spirit****Medicine, Gifting, & Gratitude**

Sweetgrass belongs to Mother Earth. Sweetgrass pickers collect properly and respectfully, for their own use and the needs of their community. They return a gift to the earth and tend to the well-being of the wiingashk. The braids are given as gifts, to honor, to say thank you, to heal and to strengthen. The sweetgrass is kept in motion. When Wally gives sweetgrass to the fire, it is a gift that has passed from hand to hand, growing richer as it is honored in every exchange (Kimmerer, 2017, p. 27) Perhaps it is no coincidence that it is Sweetgrass that reveals this story. Wiingaashk was the first to be planted by Skywoman on the back of Turtle Island. The grass gives its fragrant self to use and we receive it with gratitude. In return, through the very act of accepting the gift, the pickers open some space, let the light come in, and with a gentle tug beside the dormant buds that make new grass. Reciprocity is a matter of keeping the gift in motion through self-perpetuating cycles of giving and receiving...All of our flourishing is mutual (pg. 165-66)

**CHAPTER NINE | INDIGENOUS FUTURISMS****I'll Meet You at the End of the World**

What is the end of the world? The world has ended many times over depending on what story you know, hear, or tell. When one world (way of life) ends, another takes its place; this is the way of the world. Endings are often accompanied by trauma. Endings can be about resurgence, revolution, re-setting or re-settling. Lindsay Nixon (2019) writes: "I'm also interested in the role that audiences play in how trauma-based writing is received. I would argue, even, that the audience—the reader—has a great deal of responsibility in how Indigenous trauma is perceived." There is great truth to Nixon's statement because how trauma is viewed, and what becomes of it, leaves our control when shared with the world. There is much trauma within this research project, as well as processing and moving forward (completely different from acceptance, avoidance, or assimilating). This trauma is truth, and the truth is there was/is/will be trauma. Why? Because all marginalized, oppressed, colonized, identified as *other* groups of people who carry (on the surface or deeply buried) wounds from genocide hold this damage, in a myriad of ways, that change in time and space.

But sometimes, the audience doesn't change, and their views push away the Indigenous truth. Rena Priest (Lummi) sent me this poem about identity politics that articulates the role of the audience's perspective when digesting and regurgitating Indian trauma:

**The Literary Indian**

The publishers have visualized  
my home—the old cars  
slowly melting in the yard,  
the three-legged rez dog,  
a dried up half-flat basketball;  
too much alcohol,  
suicide, diabetes, overdose.  
Yes, in their hearts, they know  
the things I am meant to say.  
I need only to confess,  
pour on the poverty porn,  
parade out the struggle.  
But surely, don't be whole,  
human,  
full of dreams and blood.  
America has worked hard  
to ensure there are no  
full bloods anymore.  
And dreams in poetry  
are reserved  
for those who abandon

their own true history.  
For me, I'm to give  
a heartrending account  
of my Indianness—*sorry*,  
my Native Americanness  
(but not too angry, forgiving).  
And then I am to impart  
the sacred wisdom of my ancestors—  
tell how I've survived.  
Yes. The gatekeepers of poetry  
know in their minds  
what it is to be an Indian.  
*sorry*, Native American.  
They want me to affirm it.  
When I don't, they decide  
I'm not real. They go looking  
somewhere else, for what  
they think those poems  
should be, and leave me  
to my too-real Indian self. (2022)

The identity complex, my term for housing the issues surrounding identity politics in contemporary society, will not be dismantled by a social justice movement, nor be a

relevant call-to-change for all stakeholders—unless the lens is seven generations. What needs to happen to secure the legitimacy, socially, culturally, and politically for the next seven generations to come? What story will be transmitted to the next generations? I love what Gerry Ebaleroza-Tunnell (2018) says in an interview about story and the transformative powers within:

Alo — meaning "front" and Ha — meaning "breath." Aloha means the exchange of the breath of life. That is what storytelling is: the exchange of ideas, the resolution of conflict, the changing of perspectives and the evolution of our collective being. Much can be accomplished by the sharing of individual stories.

From a Pasifika Indigenous worldview, storytelling is the most natural way for Indigenous wisdom to be passed on. The method of story gathering and story making/building can help us make sense of complex interconnected situations. It can serve as a tool for people to explore better ways to connect with each other by engaging in deep listening and transformative dialogue about issues that divide us.

Whether in caves or cities, the stories we tell remain the most typical and essential form of communication. All of us tell stories. We do not see our own stories as "stories" because we see experience through them. Narratives are not abstractions of life, but how we find ourselves engaging with it. We make stories, and those stories make us human. We can awaken into stories as we awaken into language or culture, which is present before us and will continue after we are gone.

**The Circle: Time & Space**

Rodriguez (2002) asserts in *Brown* that America is an east-west country. The resonation crackles, no roars like a mighty river, because unless discussing westward expansion, my internal map of these lands is north-south or south-north. A convergence of ideology and narrative that served the settler colonial powers, as further explored within Colin Woodard's *American Nations*, where he contends that there were (and possibly still are, deeply embedded in the psyche of America) eleven regions of North America comprised of rival regional cultures.

Americans have been taught to think of the European settlement of the continent as having progressed from east to west, expanding from the English beachheads of Massachusetts and Virginia to the shores of the Pacific. Six generations of hearty frontiersmen pushed their Anglo-Saxon bloodlines into the wilderness, wrestling nature and her savage children into submission to achieve their destiny as God's chosen people: a unified republic stretching from sea to sea inhabited by a virtuous, freedom-loving people...The truth of the matter is that European culture first arrived from the south, borne by the soldiers and missionaries of Spain's expanding New World empire...(2011, p 23).

What do either of those ideas have to do with Indigenous Futurisms? The powerful thing about Indigenous Futurisms is that the future is unseen, unwritten, and wide-open to possibility. Grace Dillon (2012) who coined the term, Indigenous Futurism, describes it as such:

All forms of Indigenous futurisms are narratives of biskaabiiyang, an Anishinaabemowin word connoting the process of 'returning to ourselves,' which

involves discovering how personally one is affected by colonization, discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from its impact, and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world.

I am choosing to use this concept within the framework of my research because of the transformative power it elicits. If we want to imagine the lands of North America in a circle or from south to north, that is possible; the same goes for how the regions are defined in the future—are they defined by states with boundary lines and jurisdictions, or by the land itself and natural borders? Is identity embraced from a settler-colonial mindset, or is it redefined into a new construct of Indigeneity?

In the chapter, “Decolonizing Colonial Constructions of Indigenous Identity: a conversation between Debra Harry and Leonie Pihama,” from *The Great Vanishing Act: Blood Quantum and the Future of Native Nations* (2017) these two indigenous scholars met in 2015 and had a conversation about identity and colonial constructions of identity such as blood quantum and how they need to be looked at from the lens of colonial invasion and subjugation of indigenous nations.

**Pihama:** I see the notion of defining people by blood as to whether or not we are Indigenous as part of the longer term genocidal act as a way of ensuring that in time there will be no ability to legally define as Indigenous, define as Maori, or define as Native, and that's one of those intentions of the notions of blood quantum or degrees of blood, half cast, quarter cast. (p. 106)

**Harry:** It is definitely masterminded as an assimilation tool to ultimately fractionate us out of existence once and for all. This is a biological weapon,

similar to what was done in eugenics in which they tried to breed out the so-called “bad blood.” (p. 106) She goes on to ask: We need to ask ourselves why we are playing out this script over and over again against ourselves, against our future generations, harming our own people, and our own future well-being? A bit of critical analysis community by community, nation by nation will help us decide that we are not doing this anymore. It is not conducive to who we are as a people and where we want to be in the next 7 generations and beyond. (p. 107)

I find the conversation to be hopeful, futuristic, and wholly Indigenous. Hopeful in that more scholars and people are speaking in terms of the future, and how current (or historical) practices do not suffice for the advancement and survival of Indigenous Peoples. I am also motivated and thrilled by the existing work that is currently out in the world, such as the wellness project Michelle Johnson-Jennings and Karina Walters designed and implemented with the Choctaw Nation—a futuristic and Indigenous way of reducing the harm caused by the past.

Johnson-Jennings and Walters (2023) collaborated with the Choctaw Nation to develop the Yappalli health curriculum. *Yappalli* is a Choctaw term that means “to walk slowly and softly with awareness” (p. 247). The Yappalli pilot project included walking “portions of the 500-600 mile Trail of Tears as a health intervention” (2023, p. 247). Findings from their study “imply that a Choctaw health framework considers the embodiment of trauma in place, in the more-than-human, and within their bodies, as noted by several participants, who described holding ancestral pain in their feet” (p. 253). Just reading this gave me such a sense of hope; to see these things documented

in a scholarly research study, is affirming to say the least, and ultimately exciting to be able to share this work with community searching for healing, in an Indigenous framework. I have heard elders and cultural carriers say similar things such as this gem:

Being on the land also allowed Choctaws to reconnect with ancestors, which strengthened their cultural identity and cultural connections, and facilitated a commitment to cultural continuity. This occurred through engaging with the land as ceremony, relearning language, being aware or mindful and engaging in cultural practices. By reconnecting with ancestral place and love, transformation of trauma occurred. This re-storying included viewing healing as a journey of healing, or *fvlamat minti*, returning to the circle of community, restoring relations, and supporting behavioral change related to health. (p. 254)

Reconnection is a powerful tool for cultural revitalization, but the issue can be in who is reconnecting, or who is allowed to reconnect. I am not promoting Indigenous fraud, but I am questioning Indigenous authenticity processes when they are mired in settler-colonial genocidal practices. As a critical thinker and scholar, I am in constant search of truth. At its root, truth is about Relationality and Reciprocity. Brayboy's Tribal Critical Race Theory is a good grounding from which to evaluate truth, in particular the truth of the relationship parameters between the U.S. federal government and tribes and Indigenous people. Brayboy (2006) contends that he:

Constructed this theoretical framework because it allows me to address the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United States federal government and begin to make sense of American Indians' liminality as both racial and legal/political groups and individuals. It is this liminal space that

accounts for both the political/legal nature of our relationship with the U.S. government as American Indians and with our embodiment as racialized beings. I wish to emphasize the liminality of our position (legally/politically and socially); I do not offer one expression of it at the exclusion of another. (p. 427)

Perhaps if we consider this liminal space—the threshold between where we've been and where we are going—as a river, as we stand upon the bank of one side, we can clearly see what is on the other side, but we have no way to cross (yet), we can contemplate what place we want to arrive at. This metaphor works on many levels. Whenever there is a perceived, or realized, transition from one space to another space, it is important to look to the past so that we can purposefully enter the future. From a story-work and creative perspective, I give you Steven Paul Judd's (Kiowa/Choctaw) brilliant, thought-provoking work:



The mixing of past, present, and future to create a perspective of reality that illustrates not only the paradox Indigenous people find themselves living in but also the deeply understood power of storytelling, and humor. Judd's work often combines pop culture with well-documented, archived images to express the absurdity, beauty, and potential in being Indigenous and living under settler-colonial society.

And continuing in the story-work realm, the following is a snippet of a conversation between three Indigenous writers discussing Indigenous Futurisms:

Dr. Darcie Little Badger (Lipan Apache) on a panel interview/discussion about Native American science fiction, also referred to as Indigenous Futurisms, stated:

Both inside and outside fiction, we are pushed to the past tense. The reality is, many Indigenous cultures in North America survived an apocalypse. The key world is survived. Any future with us in it, triumphant and flourishing, is a hopeful one.

In the same interview, Elizabeth LaPensee (Anishinaabe/Metis/Irish) beautifully expressed that:

Indigenous Futurisms recognizes space-time as simultaneously past, present, and future, and therefore futurisms is as much about the future as it is about right now.

And Johnnie Jae (Otoe-Missouri/Choctaw Tribes of Oklahoma), when asked if Indigenous Futurisms has a practical application to the larger world, summed up my feelings exactly with:

Absolutely, because it is a creative representation of the struggles that we face in our societies. The stories that we tell have tremendous transformative power.

They stay with us and help shape who we decide to become, what we decide to do, and how we choose to move forward and create change in our realities.

What I find inspiring from these conversations is that the focus is on the future, the Indigenous future, and creating realities that serve to push the “past tense” narrative directly into the past. Literally and figuratively. And from an academic and theoretical perspective, the following (separate) interviews with Sandy Grande and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, moderated by Bhakti Shringarpure, call to attention the current and future direction of identity politics and humanity:

Shringarpure asks: *Coming back to your book, I have two questions. First, could you rehash your critique of identity politics or what you call the “identity paradox” for Native Americans? And I mean this question for today because I know you wrote it first in 2004.*

**Grande:** So much of identitarian politics has been taken over and it no longer resembles how the women of Combahee talked about identity politics or even Audre Lorde or some other folx. It’s shifted and so much of it centers the individual and the human in ways that I don’t think are helpful for the overall political project, not a decolonial project, anyway. If that’s the starting point — the individual — then, to me, you’re already defeated. Whereas if you start elsewhere, with care for land, care for water, then it would be different. It’s just so wrong. And I don’t get it because we’re facing total disaster, right? Whatever we do politically, we’re poised to not have clean air and water in the near future, and there’s still an inability to center something outside of ourselves. I don’t know

what it is, I just don't know what it is! I'm not sure if that's helpful in terms of what you're thinking about. (2022)

Shringarpure inquires: *I want to ask you about global or international Indigenous studies scholarship and how it transforms existing ways of thinking. In the US, for example, race is always the main analytic, followed by gender and sexuality. How does indigeneity reframe and decenter our existing analytics today, especially when one is thinking of decolonializing work and activism?*

**Smith:** Well, I think it does a couple of things. First, it locates intersectionality in a particular territory that has been colonized and structures the way race functions in colonizing experiences. And then it intersects with the way sex and gender have been structured into those experiences. It offers a way of understanding how all those concepts have worked for Indigenous peoples. Even the concept of Indigenous peoples is post–World War II in terms of the creation of postcolonialism, the role of the United Nations, and the role of Indigenous peoples starting to mobilize, particularly around what became the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Having said that, Indigenous peoples existed prior to colonialism, prior to imperialism. So, another key aspect is access to ancient knowledge, ancient ways of knowing, access to another worldview, another imagination, another way of seeing ourselves in the world. This is what we are able to bring as a strength. Colonialism hasn't destroyed us entirely, but we've got to find our Indigenous

knowledges, our Indigenous cultures. That is what ultimately reimagines our humanity, rather than the project of dismantling colonialism. (2021)

The term hybrid is ubiquitous these days. We teach hybrid classes; our work schedules are hybrid; our motorized vehicles are hybrid; our writing is hybrid; our food is hybrid and so forth. Take it a step further and the future will most likely be hybrid. The word is both a noun and an adjective; it is a thing and also describes a thing. The noun is “a thing made by combining two different elements; a mixture” and the adjective is “of mixed character; composed of different elements.” From “Hybridity and Indigenous Identity in the work of Leanne Betasamosake Simpson”, a critical analysis by Halee Kirkwood (2021), the following questions arise:

Is Indigeneity defined as an ethnic or a political category? Is this performance art or literature? Is Indigeneity a belonging, a set of cultural practices, or something else? Does one tribe's proximity in location (following relocation) to another necessitate kinship, though history and cultural practice may differ wildly? Are we held together by a thread or a braid? The question seems to always be, what is this and what am I and what are we, and the truth is we're all, Native and Genre alike, messy, blended, beautiful beings, particular to our families and ourselves. To live as an urban and/or a mixed Native is to be keenly aware of the legacy between Indigenous and colonial society, a legacy built into the foundations of our cities, reservations, and neighborhoods, a legacy that flows in our love, in our blood. Being an urban and/or mixed-race Native can entail assimilation or adaptation. What I love about Betasamosake's exploration of this identity is the

emphasis placed on adaptation, the struggle and joy and creativity of holding onto your people in a society that'd rather you let go.

I love the complexities and truths within Kirkwood's exploration and analysis of Betasamosake's creative process and works. The very notion of hybridity speaks volumes to the nuances and shape-shifting of identity politics for Indigenous people. This research has provided me with concrete evidence that Indigenous identity exists as more than the fractions or percentages of blood, names on government rolls and documents, and the singular, stereotypical archetypes that deny personal autonomy and cultural connection or re-connection.

### **Closing Reflections**

This chapter is all reflections, supported by outside sources. I am considering the future of identity politics in relationship to survivance and collaboration, and in connection to the future seven generations. I feel hopeful and challenged. This creative piece—a poetic take on Land Acknowledgements for an op-ed in the *Inlander* by CMarie Fuhrman (2021) that ends with this heart-twister sums up my expectations for the future:

Let us acknowledge that unless action is taken to identify and empower Indigenous peoples, erase inaccurate history from every school curriculum, carry out land-based justice and climate change policy, a Land Acknowledgment is a perfunctory, alienating, and an otherwise hollow gesture. Acknowledgment means acceptance, admittance; acknowledgment is a dead word, is not a verb, is not deed, does not mean education. Acknowledgment means too late for an

apology. Read me your Declaration of Change. Detail your Plan of Procedure.

Show me your Map to Equality. And then, just maybe then, I might be convinced that your Land Acknowledgment is not but another broken treaty.

We aren't at the end of the world yet, but it will soon arrive if we don't collectively acknowledge this land as the most precious and honored life force that we have.

Reconnection and revitalization of traditional Indigenous ways of knowing and being will be the catalyst for the long-term protection of the lands, waterways, and sky from the destructive onslaught of settler-colonialism and global capitalism. If we use identity politics for anything, it should be to unite and save our Mother.

**CHAPTER TEN | PARADIGM SHIFTING**

*Culture, as Indian people understood it, was basically a lifestyle by which a people acted. It was self-expression, but not a conscious self-expression. Rather, it was an expression of the essence of a people. ~ Vine Deloria Jr.*

**Full Circle & We Begin Again**

Circling around to the beginning of what I wanted to explore, examine, and be in relationship with – Tribal enrollment (and disenrollment) is fraught with historical genocidal and eradication practices, earning a seat at the table of historical trauma that impacts Indigenous people to this day. The United States Federal Government only recognizes 576 Tribes, leaving near the same number unrecognized, meaning without sovereignty, albeit limited, that federally recognized Tribes have. The sovereignty to decide membership or citizenship—that is, who is enrolled in the Tribe, and who is disenrolled—who belongs.

The majority of tribal enrollment practices are based on eradication, termination, and assimilation policies of the U.S. Government. Blood quantum is at the top of the list of requirements, as most Tribes require a government issued card that states the amount of Indian blood your body possesses: “All portions of the Request for Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood (CDIB) must be completed. You must show your relationship to an enrolled member(s) of a federally recognized Indian tribe, whether it is through your birth mother or birth father, or both” ([bia.gov](http://bia.gov)). The catch is that not every Indian or Alaskan Native can be a “card carrying” person because of a myriad of culturally hegemonic termination practices and what governmental rolls their

ancestors did or did not get onto. This ongoing practice negates and ignores the thousands of Indigenous peoples belonging to tribes and bands and clans that were destroyed by war, were absorbed into larger tribes, fled, and hid from the murderous settler-colonial military, or did not accept the removal from their homelands, thus were not documented on the few governmental rolls necessary to “prove” Indian blood. I will go so far as to presume that most people were not considering what effect their choices for survival would mean on future generations. Survival is a tricky beast, and who are we to judge and issue proclamations around who is, or who is not, Indigenous to this land?

To have a paradigm shift which would be a fundamental change in basic concepts and practices within the education system as currently embedded within the American psyche. A paradigm is also an example or pattern of something the synonyms are standard, prototype, archetype, model, these are all things that can be changed, reevaluated, reassessed, reimagined as new information is accessible due to technology and our ability and understanding of indigenous people's globally, there does not seem to be a reasonable obstacle toward shifting the paradigm to include Indigenous knowledges.

Ned Blackhawk (2022) states: “Revising interpretations of the past is an inherent part of the study of history, and as each generation reinterprets, it does so in response to new circumstances, ideas, and conditions.” (p. 4) Yet, irrespective of revisionist histories, Indigenous peoples seek to eliminate the misrepresentations and overriding authority of the settler-colonial narratives so that we can locate areas of alignment to move forward in the same direction; the routes may be different, but the arrival

destination is the same—reclamation and acceptance of Indigenous Knowledges and histories. Marie Battiste (2008) posits that understanding and practicing appropriate protocols and processes in approaching research in Indigenous communities:

The responsibility for educating both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about these principles and guidelines is both a community and personal responsibility of every Indigenous person and among those using or taking up Indigenous knowledge. (p. 499)

And John Trudell, poet and activist, has a term “descendants and ancestors—DNA” that calls for all Indigenous people to seek new paradigms for the survival of future generations. Legitimacy is a real issue that will never be solved in a capitalistic system, or in a system that relies on vertical power structures. This heartache, this deep and festering wound--the layering of belonging, self-determination, recognition, and ultimately, survival beneath the surface of political power and capital, is perpetuated by the (mis)use of identity politics towards Indigenous people.

The purpose of this research project is not to interrogate the identity of individual or group/tribal Indigenous people; it is to interrogate and perhaps expand upon the settler-colonial mechanisms that laid claim to who was and wasn't Native. The purpose of sharing the research collaborator's stories is to provide depth and scope to how contemporary Indigenous identity is framed, accepted, and rejected in reality.

### **Research Findings (Collaborator Data, Observation, Analysis of Texts)**

Witnessing the research collaborators' exchanges with each other, body language, and general affect before, during, and after the talking circles, one-on-one

interviews and informal discussions, combined with locating general themes throughout all the collaborator's stories, I have determined the following:

- All collaborators had an authentic desire to be transparent and open in sharing personal and ancestral histories.
- A sense of anxiety around personal identity as Indigenous, regardless of being tribally enrolled or not, existed for the self-identified women and non-binary collaborators.
- A clear division between social and cultural Indigenous identity and political/legal tribal identity existed.
- A clear understanding of how tribal sovereignty relates to only federally recognized tribal citizens/members in the eyes of the law.
- Being "Indigenous" means involvement and accountability to the Indigenous community wherever the collaborators are living.
- The majority of collaborators reside away from their tribal homelands.
- The majority of the collaborators grew up "Indian" or around other Natives.
- None of the collaborators were pro-blood quantum as a tool for belonging or tribal enrollment.
- For the older collaborators (over age 45), the role of identity politics has drastically changed from a positive, self and group-affirming concept into a threatening (internal and external) mechanism of gatekeeping and strife.
- Skin color and being perceived as "white-passing" or "white-presenting" was a challenge for community acceptance and belonging, while darker skin color was

viewed as a challenge only within higher education institutions and outside Indigenous circles.

- All collaborators live within an Indigenous paradigm.

### **Findings: Broad Perspective**

1. Story recognizes the reciprocity of humanity as the foundation of authentic relationality.

2. The Medicine Wheel or Circle only knows undone boundaries and the truth in balancing the body, heart, mind, and spirit.

3. Principles of Indigenous well-being cannot be sustained within the current system of identity politics and do not align with the 7 guiding principles.

4. Indigenous people are in the center of the circle, settler-colonial projects are always circling the circle.

I propose a new paradigm, guided by the following principles: Affirm & Confirm (identity and belonging), Intellectual Intuition (ancestral and cultural teachings inform academic spaces), Circle-Center-Connect (building and sustaining resilient communities). We must consider the past, present, and future when making decisions that result in policies; divorcing the future of Indigenous survivance from the past will inevitably circle back to the same issues, under different names, of termination and eradication and assimilation. By reminding ourselves to be ever cognizant of traditional teachings, ways of being and knowing, Indigenous people have a blueprint for survival that surpasses the western world's reliance on technology and capital.

Duane Champagne in “American Indian Studies is for Everyone,” provides what I interpret as a warning of sorts: “One does not have to be a member of a culture to understand what culture means or to interpret a culture in a meaningful way.” On its face, this is word play and multiple inferences can be gathered; however, he goes on to state, “The mere presence of Indian blood within a scholar, however, does not ensure better or more sensitive historical or cultural understandings of Indian peoples. This can come only with training, sensitivity, knowledge, and study” (p. 182-183).

This speaks to the heart of the matter, yes? Not in terms of tribal sovereignty but with identity and belonging and protecting and promoting authentic Indigenous narratives.

Will identity politics demean and degrade Native American authenticity? Can identity politics work to uplift Indigenous rights and ways of being and knowing?

### **Further Considerations**

The leading title of this work, *Paradigm Shift*, is an ode to the possibilities of fundamental change for the near future to accept and honor concepts and praxis of Indigeneity and Indigenous ways of learning within institutions of higher education to be a valued academic system. Paradigm shifting is also indicative of the need for Indigenous people to be expansive in the ongoing protection of limited sovereignty and self-determination.

Colonial violence and settler-colonialism is permanent, like a disease that we get a vaccine for but there is no cure, so it can morph, and we get infected with the next strain. We keep trying and wishing for immunity; knowing that is not the reality. What is

reality is the journey and story through the Circle and looking forward through a lens of the past.

- Further investigation on the impacts of settler-colonialism on unenrolled Native Americans is needed to realize a more comprehensive picture and to engage the future from a problem-solution mindset.
- More collaborative academic works across Indigenous identities would broaden the conversation and add validity to the concerning issues.
- Acknowledging the limited objectivity within higher education because it is guarded by western thought and brings implicit biases and worldviews to into the realm of research, pedagogy, to the classroom, and the social fabric of the institutions.
- Recognize and recalibrate our willingness to believe narratives that are told to us by dominant power structures has far reaching consequences. The actual United States Day of independence was on September 6th, 1883, per the Paris treaty and it not the 4th of July as we have celebrated; the idea of civilization and civilized used against groups of people has been driven by Christianity and puritanical ideologies.

**Figure 10***American Progress*

*American Progress*, (1872) by John Gast, is an allegorical representation of the modernization of the new west. Columbia, a personification of the United States, is shown leading civilization westward with the American settlers. She is shown bringing light from the East into the West, stringing telegraph wire, holding a school textbook that will instill knowledge, [1] and highlights different stages of economic activity and evolving forms of transportation.[2]

This painting shows "Manifest Destiny" (the belief that the United States should expand from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean). In 1872, artist John Gast painted a popular scene of people moving west that captured what American frontier people were doing: pushing toward the darkened west, with purity, light, railways, and settler

travelers bringing their agriculture and farming; the buffalo and Natives running away from the onslaught. The saying a picture is worth a thousand words is apt.

Eve Tuck's response to Sandy Grande's "Challenging Whitestream Feminism," includes a numbered list of challenges for whitestream feminists' theorists to take on (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, 2013). The third challenge resonates with me during the undertaking of this research project and is as follows:

Recognize the persistence of Indigenous epistemologies, or ways of knowing. Native feminisms make claims not to an "authentic" past outside of settler colonialism, but an ongoing project of resistance that continues to contest patriarchy and its power relationships. One initial approach would be to engage with concerns forwarded by Native feminist scholars, including ethnographic refusal, futurity, intellectual sovereignty, decolonization, queer Native theory, issues of identity and self-determination, colonial space, and the archive. (p. 216)

Looking closely at how patriarchy and bringing into focus the concepts aligned within Indigenous Feminisms, in my estimation, could foster the potency of Indigeneity.

Furthermore, imagining and (re)creating this image depicting "American Progress" and the symbolic manifestation of a white-dominant Christian destiny to illustrate Indigenous Destiny is a priority.

## Closing Reflections

The pandemic brought about a fear a fear of loss of the unknown of people in power making decisions for us, much like it must have felt leading up to the colonies separating from Great Britain to officially take over Turtle Island. I question what humans find as self-evident-- is it declaring a baseline of what is acceptable or believable? And in the very beginning, was identity politics a way to curtail power structures, and if so, how can the concept be put into action to retain power for groups of people who are being marginalized, othered, and oppressed by dominant society?

The question remains: how do Indigenous peoples cleanse the “colonial wound” in order to not be infected and continue their way of life within their self-determined narrative? What I did not expect was the intense internal and external conflict within Indigenous students, faculty, and staff to determine and practice their Indigenous identity in political and social/community realms, nor did I have a grasp on the division between political identity and social/community identity. How these often-separate identities play a vital role in successful navigation through higher education that is mired in western, euro-centric pedagogy and ideology. Gerry Ebalagoza-Tunnell explains:

That the struggle to de-colonize myself came through education—colonized education. My genetic makeup and life experiences meant that I was not only a member of those oppressed, but also the oppressors. My partaking in the system of hierarchical oppression, regardless of where I stood within it, was one of the colonizer. I eventually discovered that the decolonization of one’s mind is not

only rooted in the access to knowledge, but in the willingness to dismantle rooted and programmed belief systems. I utilized Western epistemology to inform myself about myself. It is now apparent to me as a Pasifika Indigenous scholar and cultural practitioner, I must learn and teach to walk in both worlds to ensure that my voice and the voices of all future generations are not oppressed. (Litvin, 2018)

I do live in two worlds, as do most of us, regardless of the desire to do so, but out of necessity in navigating dominant thinking and lifeways while protecting and practicing an Indigenous way of thinking and being within systems and structures designed and reinforced to promote settler-colonial power. The world is one world. However, there can be unity under the belief, value, and practice held since time immemorial—everything is connected. And yet, how does one researcher attempt to illustrate connections between abstractions because identity politics and Indigeneity live within a few concrete spaces, pun intended. The very notion of any concept is abstract, and it isn't until humans put tactics and systems in place to show how the concept interfaces with the world that we truly grasp the threat or the possibility of the working concept. This is the very essence of settler-colonialism—the cause and effect of a conceptual, ideological thing actually, literally, put into action. And the same can be said of Indigeneity and Indigenous identity and Indigenous scholarship—put into action, we are living our ancestors' dreams.

I will close this story with lines of poetic beauty:

***The Storyteller's Escape***

The storyteller keeps the stories

all the escape stories

she says "With these stories of

ours

we can escape almost

anything

with these stories we will

survive."

(Silko, 2019, p. 94)

## EPILOGUE

My body is in desperate need of stretching and moving out of the position of leaning forward, listening, reading, writing. My heart is heavy like a sponge that is full of water. My mind is full of spiraling thoughts and ideas, pieces of poems, snippets of conversations, and melodies of songs. My spirit is both quiet and alert, calm and restless, nostalgic, and futuristic. This is me closing the story that I have been inside and on the periphery of for the past few years. This journey has reinforced my belief in building and sustaining authentic relationships and community with others, and in the profound value of stories. It is a basic human instinct to find ways that explain the world around us. We craft personal narratives, familial narratives, historical, contemporary, and future narratives for the purpose of cultural and knowledge transmission. Thus, we are all connected through story-work that can be interpreted in a myriad of ways, depending on time and space, and who is receiving and who is giving. I leave this page and story (for the time being) with a poem I wrote that is equal parts knowledge and memory.

### QUANTIFIABLE

I.

Did you know there are 27 bones in one human hand?

If those 27 comprise a quarter of all the bones in one human,

And supposing a human has two hands, thus half the bones of

Our human are located in the hands; hands that love or

Kill with half the bones of the body like if we had our Indian

Blood or Irish blood in just our hands, were measured by  
Our very hands

II.

If the average human heart thumps around 100,000 beats  
A day, pumping 2000 gallons of blood through its preciousness,  
Does the heart know when the blood is our Amerindian blood  
Or other? Can the heart feel the forces of oppressed and oppressor  
The story of the bloods; but more importantly, does the pure-blood  
Feel different as it cruises up and into the heart, leaving just the same  
Our hearts beat

III.

Do the experts truly know the brain holds as much data as a 64-gigabyte iPhone,  
Information from past, present, and possibly the future—if one believes  
Outside the scope of tangible--If the data were translated to sound, and  
Echolocation practiced, could we find ourselves in reflected sound waves?  
Can we program what data we keep, and what we destroy, or replace with  
Stories from ancestors, awakened by our calling  
Our muscle-memory

IV.

No other in the mammalian world has the uvula dangling in the back of the  
Mouth with its precious cargo, packed cavity of nerves and muscle and bone  
The uvula would be proof enough, yes, that all humans are the same  
Placing to bed, under a spell to never wake, atrocities of inequality

Heart thumps of blood and belonging, bones of hands unmarked,

Brains powered by such knowledge, the past

Our undoing

V.

On average, a human takes around 20,000 breaths a day

Breathing in the air-memory of the land, breath held inside until

Released, and what if each breath carried a piece of self

Entered another and another for no breath can find a home

No ownership or allotment, no safe passage as breath would tell the story

Our legacy

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# TE WHARE WĀNANGA O AWANUIĀRANGI

03/04/2019

Student ID: 2170450

Dawn Barron  
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Tēnā koe Dawn

*Tēnā koe i roto i ngā tini āhuatanga o te wā.*

## **Ethics Research Committee Application Outcome: Approved.**

The Ethics Research Committee met on Monday 03<sup>rd</sup> April and I am pleased to inform you that your ethics application has been approved. The committee commends you on your hard work to this point and wish you well with your research.

Please contact your Supervisor, **Associate Professor Mera Penehira**, as soon as possible on receipt of this letter so that they can answer any questions that you may have regarding your research, now that your ethics application has been approved.

Please ensure that you keep a copy of this letter on file and use the 'Ethics committee document reference number: **EC2018.01.048** in any correspondence relating to your research, with participants, or other parties; so that they know you have been given approval to undertake your research.

If you have any queries regarding the outcome of your ethics application, please contact us on our free phone number 0508926264 or via e-mail to [ssc@wananga.ac.nz](mailto:ssc@wananga.ac.nz).

Nāku noa nā  
Kahukura Epiha  
Ethics Committee Administrator

Ethics committee document reference number: **EC2018.01.048**

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