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Indigenous Storytelling as Decolonial Praxis, Ceremony and at Colby

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Indigenous Storytelling as Decolonial Praxis, Ceremony and at Colby

Georgia Goodman

An Honors Thesis presented to the English Department
2023
Honors Advisor: Professor Samantha Plasencia
Second Reader: Professor Chelsea Fairbank

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Preface 5
Introduction 12
  What is Storytelling? 12
  Key Terms 15
    Decoloniality 15
    Praxis 16
    Positionality 17
  Terminology 17
Chapter 1: Indigenous Storywork as Decolonial Praxis 20
  Praxis 22
  Differentiating Decolonial Praxis 24
  Decoloniality and the University 28
  Circles and Cyclicality 31
Chapter 2: Ceremony through Positionality and Reflexivity in Indigenous Storytelling 43
  Introduction (Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address) 47
  Reflexivity and Reciprocity 50
    Reciprocity 50
    The Spoken Word 52
    Reflexivity and Reflection 54
  Positionality 59
    (Absence of) Positionality through Objectivism, Masculinity and Place 64
  Sustaining Practices and to Research 69
Closing Thoughts and Thinking Bigger 72
  What now? 72
  Research in the Field of Literature 73
  Thinking Bigger: Extrapolating to Colby's English Department 75
  Thank you for your time. 83
Bibliography: 84

Preface

I want to begin this thesis with an acknowledgment that Colby College is situated on the stolen and unceded homeland of the Wabanaki confederacy, The People of the Dawn. The Wabanaki confederacy is currently consisting of four tribal nations, the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Mi'kmaq peoples. I recognize the distinct sovereignty and political self-governance of the Wabanaki peoples, the agency of waters, lands and more-than-human kin, and the reciprocal relationships between these beings. I want to offer a moment to pause in acknowledgement of the nations of the Wabanaki Confederacy and waters, lands, and more-than-human kin whose lives were taken through genocidal strategies of settler colonialism.

I recognize that the Wabanaki Tribal Nations are self-determining peoples with their own political, legal, and sovereign entities.

J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (Kānaka Maoli) talks of enduring Indigeneity in light of settler colonialism. I will talk throughout this thesis about settler colonialism on Turtle Island (what we now call the United States). I want to again point towards the fact that “settler colonialism is a structure and not an event, and because Indigenous peoples are still subject to that structure—an ongoing

genocidal project"[1] that settler colonialism is still a structure operating and is not siphonable to the past.

A land acknowledgement does not rectify harmful actions taken against the Wabanaki peoples and lands. Further, I recognize that I benefit from these actions by living and learning at Colby College. I recognize my positionality as a settler scholar here at Colby College. It is not my place to represent Indigeneity. Rather, this thesis serves to amplify Indigenous scholars and work within these critical issues which recenter the power of language, plant sentience, and stories' power to transcend. Further, as I touched on, I am examining the role of settler colonialism specifically on Turtle Island in this thesis.

As a settler scholar, I position myself as not knowing all the information. My story is limited because of the positionality I take up. I am a settler scholar from Cumberland, Maine, home of peoples of the Abenaki nation, which was previously part of the Wabanaki confederation.[2] The Abenaki peoples of where I come from in Maine farmed the plains of the Kennebec and Androscoggin River and were nomadic peoples.[3] As Maine was colonized, the Abenaki peoples were forcefully moved and relocated. The Wabanaki Confederation is made up of the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot nations and are the sovereign Indigenous Peoples of Maine.

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[1] J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "'A Structure, Not an Event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," Lateral 5, no. 1 (2016).
[2] Thomas Bennett, "Cumberland & North Yarmouth," Maine Memory Network - Our Shared History - Page 1 of 4 (Maine Historical Society, 2012), http://cny.mainememory.net/page/1638/display.html.
[3] Margaret Bruchac, "Native land use and settlements in the Northeastern Woodlands," (2004).

This thesis seeks to amplify Indigenous lifeways, diplomacies, sciences, diplomatic relations, and the power of storytelling. This is not a piece analyzing Indigenous culture. Rather, this thesis returns the gaze to the settler colonial state, specifically its storytelling ideologies, to show that systemic practices of inequity in storytelling can be disrupted and decolonized through a recentering of Indigenous ideologies. For example, reciprocity with lands and animals, reflection on positionality and decentering colonial understandings of time and place.

In this thesis I have borrowed stories from many Indigenous nations. I intentionally chose to only include stories that were already written down and publicly available. This should be understood as a methodological/ethical choice to critically include Indigenous stories which have been written down by Indigenous scholars, with the consent of the nation which they originated from. I posit throughout this thesis that much of the ceremony, wonder, knowledge building and community creation which comes from storytelling comes through the spoken word. Many of these stories may have originated in spoken form, but in an active effort to have this project be generative and not extractive I have not taken or transcribed any spoken stories, but rather chosen to work with the stories that Indigenous peoples themselves chose to put into writing.

Many of the settler stories I have chosen to reflect on in this thesis are children's books. Not all the Indigenous stories I have chosen are for children specifically but rather stories that have sustained lifeways since time immemorial. However, I found that some of the only settler books which even talk about the agency of more-than-humans, animals and lands are children's books. Adult

literature in western contexts stands in contrast. A google search of the most taught literature books drew titles like *Catcher in the Rye* by J.D. Salinger, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee: titles which allegorically reference animals, typically in subordination to humans or representative of hidden human desire. Think of *Of Mice and Men* where Lennie strangles the aforementioned mouse, or how *Animal Farm* uses animals to expose messages of power and capability for revolution, while perverting pigs as power hungry and cruel beings.

I want to offer a question of reflexis here, and ask why this is? Is it because we do not view the agency of more-than-humans, animals, and lands as "adult" issues? Do we siphon teachings of empathy and selflessness just to children because in the west we consider these to be trivial? Do we then teach adults solely about sex, power, and money? Like in *Pamela* by Samuel Richardson where we learn of male superiority and women as property, or in *The Flea* where John Donne explores eroticism through the image of a flea, or in *Julius Caesar* by Shakespeare— power, power, power**.** What does this reproduce?

I have chosen these settler books (*Fantastic Mr. Fox*, *Goodnight Moon*, John Muir's journals) intentionally and hope they can offer you a moment to reflect on why it is only in children's books that we find foxes with feelings and spiders who feel sad.

Further, I use the key term "decoloniality" throughout this thesis, and as an analytical framework. Eve Tuck (Unangax̂) and K. Wayne Yang offer that decoloniality in truth is not present in Western academia, nor is it able to function

within our current operating systems. They argue that the current understanding and conceptualization of Indigenous peoples in academia reasserts a "settler move to innocence" and reassertion of colonial apparatuses. Indigenous peoples are "rendered visible in mainstream educational research in two main ways: as "at risk" peoples and as asterisk peoples.[4] Posing Indigenous peoples as "at risk" siphons them to a community who experienced harm in the *past* and "asterisk" continues the settler colonial narrative where Indigenous peoples are not still self-governing and self-determining peoples. This both "erases and then conceals the erasure of Indigenous peoples within the settler colonial nation-state and moves Indigenous nations as 'populations' to the margins of public discourse."[5] In this project, I have neither deemed Indigenous peoples as "at risk" nor as "asterisk" peoples as I have centered Indigenous stories and scholars as the majority citations for this work. I further have identified how we can learn from and with the lessons of these Indigenous thinkers to create a more just and equitable world of stories.

Throughout this thesis I have delineated the positionality of all the authors I introduced in the text. I learned with Max Liboiron (Métis/Michif) here, as they say, it is customary to find "Indigenous authors with their nation/affiliation, while settlers and white scholars almost always remain unmarked."[6] Here, I want to be clear with my methodology. I have included the Indigenous authors "nation/affiliation" in parentheses the first time that I introduce them in the text.

[4] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society,* 2012: 22.
[5] Tuck and Yang, 22.
[6] Max Liboiron, *Pollution is colonialism*. Duke University Press, 2021: 3.

Next, I have included "(settler)" for the authors which make their settler positionality known to the world. I have included "(unmarked)" for the settler scholars who have not made their positionality known. Finally, I have left blank the space after authors where their positionality is not made explicitly known in their writing- through this marking of positionality we can be "explicit about our origins [and it] might be a first step to writing and reading together with the specificity of relations close in mind."[7] I argue that positionality is crucial and want to nod here to Great Grandmother Mary Lyons (Anishinaabe) as she has shared with my advisor, and my advisor with me, how we must make our positionality known. I think this can then continue to disrupt the white settler norm of scholars through making relationality abundantly clear and known.

I have chosen to provide "guide-quotes" to reorient myself as a settler scholar learning from Indigenous practices and Indigenous cultures. I borrow the terminology "guide-quote"[8] from Sylvia Wynter's essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom." These guide-quotes serve to "orient the reader as the argument struggles to think/articulate itself outside the terms of the disciplinary discourses of our present epistemological order."[9] I also seek to disrupt the trope of linearity imposed by settler colonialism on our discourse, histories, and experiences. By including guide-quotes throughout my chapters, I

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[7] Rasmus Rodineliussen, "Colonial, Decolonial, Anticolonial–the How in Doing Science," In Anthropology Book Forum, vol. 8, no. 1.
[8] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: Towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation—An argument," *CR: The new centennial review* 3, no. 3 (2003).
[9] Wynter, 331.

continually situate my reader at a place of beginning, reading words of Indigenous scholars.

I hope that you will read this thesis with slowness and intentionality. And wonder, wonder how these words will live in your mind, body, and space. Wonder how we can learn with these scholars and writers and singers and storytellers and authors and change how we read, write, and live together.

I'll close the preface with a guide quote on possibility. I hope you'll hold the idea of "maybe" as you read this thesis. I hope you'll allow yourself the chance to be broken open in wonder.

> "The story begins with a poor, elderly main character whose horse runs away. When his neighbors say "this is indeed a great misfortune," the elder replies, "Maybe," and smiles. The elder continues to reply "maybe when his neighbors react to his horse's returning with other horses, when his grandson breaks his leg while trying to tame one of the horses, and when this broken leg keeps the grandson from going off to war. By the end of the story, even the neighbors say "maybe" to each other."[10]
>
> - Hopi (Navajo and Coconino) Story: "Maybe"

[10] Lois J. Einhorn, *The Native American oral tradition: Voices of the spirit and soul*, Praeger, 2000: 82.

Introduction

What is Storytelling?

Storytelling and oral histories provide accounts of the past in order for us to pass knowledge systems down through generations. Daniel Wildcat (Yuchi/Muscogee) says that stories are a way of "attentive living."[11] They are a way of living in "reciprocity"[12] with the land, with other humans, and with more-than-human beings. Changes in tense can stimulate a connection between past and present. The tension which Robin Wall Kimmerer (Potawatomi) says: "the broken link between land and people, between the past and the present, aches like a badly broken bone still unknit."[13] Kimmerer is writing of the "broken link" caused by the removal attempts of colonizers on Indigenous Peoples in what we know as the United States. This link between past and present is spoken through tense switching in storytelling. Verbs in the historical present "signal unexpected and emotionally memorable 'turns'" whereas the past tense verbs "allow for the evaluation and logical coherence of the tale."[14] By using both, a story becomes both one of emotional value but also of truth and association with the present through the use of past tense verbs.

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[11] Daniel R. Wildcat, *Red alert!: Saving the planet with Indigenous knowledge*, 2010: 15.
[12] Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Putting Down Roots," In *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2014: 267.
[13] Kimmerer, 264.
[14] Monika Fludernik, "The historical present tense yet again: Tense switching and narrative dynamics in oral and quasi-oral storytelling," Text-Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse 11, no. 3 (1991): 382.

Indigenous storytelling offers us a set of methods that can change how we read literature within the broader context of literary studies. Terry Tafoya (Taos Pueblo) says that "when you tell a story you 'wet it with your breath'. You give it life, just as when you give water to a seed it blossoms."[15] When stories are given water and "blossom" they take the form of truth in the fact that they are being retold and relearned and remembered. Indigenous Stories hold their intentions when they are "wet" and take shape through the form of spoken word. When these stories emerge into Indigenous epistemologies they are "disruptive, sustaining, knowledge producing, and theory-in-action. Stories are decolonization theory in its most natural form."[16] The Hopi *Maybe* story is this praxis of "decolonization theory" in a natural form. The story, *Maybe*, is a chance for introspection and it "encourages the imagination."[17] It is a chance for suspended positionality and a chance for community building. *Maybe* is "disruptive, sustaining, knowledge producing, and theory-in-action" as it provides no clean ending and no neat conclusion. It is offering a lesson to be interpreted how the listener needs it. It is a way for theory to operate as the listener and storyteller insert themselves into different roles throughout the story. The Hopi story of *Maybe* is an example of how decolonial practices exist in verity in Indigenous storytelling. Indigenous storytelling is a "disruptive" practice of "sustaining" Indigenous communities, enriching connections, and knowledge

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[15] Einhorn, 88.

[16] Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes, "Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance," Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society 2, no. 1 (2013): 2.

[17] Einhorn, 78.

intergenerationally, and working against the Western, Euro-centric rhetoric in order to resist settler colonialism.

Stories allow for adaptation to fit the present and give space for emphasis where emphasis may be needed. For example, the story of the Black Snake Prophecy which is shared by Dallas Goldtooth (Mdewakanton Dakota/Diné) and the Dakota Access Pipeline. He says that the Black Snake represents "dysfunction and unhealthiness."[18] This Black Snake prophecy was used first in discussions of the railroads and the harm and destruction which would come from deforestation. The next iteration of this story was with the creation of Tarmac roads. Today, the Black Snake is representative of all pipelines. An oral story, in this case a prophecy, can take on new forms as we evolve and grow. Oral stories are cyclical. They take new life in new situations and in doing so work against settler colonial erasure practices. Settler colonialism insists upon linearity: for history, for knowledge production, for relationship making. One comes after another, not growing from but jumping off. There is a disconnect which allows harm to sit in one place, teachings to sit in one place and not evolve. Oral storytelling, because it can adapt and alter, reasserts a cyclicality and circularity to life and to the places where we keep knowledge. They adapt and they change to continually serve their original purpose, and in doing so appreciate the value the original tellers placed on the oral telling. Retelling is re-appreciating the knowledge of ancestors.

[18] Dallas Goldtooth, "The Native American Prophecy of the Black Snake," Bioneers: rLOVEution from the Heart of Nature, June 5, 2020, https://bioneers.org/the-native-american-prophecy-of-the-black-snake/.

Indigenous Storytelling is not synonymous with fables. Indigenous stories "are a reclamation of Indigenous voice, Indigenous land, and Indigenous sovereignty."[19] Indigenous stories are a truth, a history. The equating of Indigenous Stories with fiction or as made-up is rooted in the Euro-colonialist dominating effect of linear time and of dominant histories. Indigenous histories become contestable opposed to the white, Eurocentric colonial historical narratives. This comes as colonial rhetoric is adapted and becomes systematic in our language, schools, worlds in our time now.

Key Terms

I use a few key terms throughout this thesis which are pertinent to define before delving into this work.

Decoloniality

The first term is "decoloniality." I borrow heavily from Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's work "Decolonization is not a Metaphor" in this thesis. Tuck and Yang help to articulate what decolonization is through what it is *not*.

> "It is not converting Indigenous politics to a Western doctrine of liberation; it is not a philanthropic process of 'helping' the at-risk and alleviating suffering; it is not a generic term for struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes. The broad umbrella of social justice may have room underneath for all of these efforts. By contrast, decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice."[20]

[19] Sium and Ritskes, 13.
[20] Tuck and Yang, 21.

Decolonization functions in this thesis as an anti-colonization standpoint. It is "not a metonym for social justice" and that must be abundantly clear. In this thesis, and beyond, decolonization is not "neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny."[21]

Further, decolonization, "sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding."[22] It is disruptive, decolonization works outside of the constraints of the settler state and outside of academia, which I will expand upon later in this thesis. Decolonization is a tool for thinking through how Indigenous storytelling expands upon futures, generates community, understanding praxis, transcends humanness and builds ceremony.

Praxis

Praxis is: "the use of a theory or a belief in a practical way."[23] Praxis is when we take the epistemological into the ontological. My advisor defines epistemology as "how we do" and ontology as "how we do" – praxis is the limbo. Taking the theoretical, the ideas and the hypotheses and putting them into praxis. Throughout this thesis I am talking mostly about decolonial praxis. Taking the essence of decoloniality and bringing it into a practice of how we be and do.

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[21] Aimé Césaire and Joan Pinkham, *Discourse on Colonialism*, NYU Press, 2000: 32.
[22] Frantz Fanon, "The Wretched of the Earth, 1961," Trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press 6 (2004): 36.
[23] "Praxis," Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2022).

Praxis is a psychological term first used by Aristotle,[24] and, as I will go on to explain, praxis and decolonial praxis are necessarily differentiated.

Positionality

Another key term is "positionality". Positionality is how we must "acknowledge who we are as individuals, and as members of groups, and as resting in and moving within social positions."[25] The preface of this thesis serves to acknowledge my positionality as a white settler scholar working on colonized Wabanaki land writing a thesis about Indigenous storytelling. I again call on my privilege and would like to also thank the lands, waters, grass, animals, rocks, and all other more-than-human beings who create the world which I am able to work and live within.

Terminology

Throughout this thesis word choice is purposeful as critical praxis. I look to N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) who says that "my words exist at the level of my voice. If I do not speak with care, my words are wasted."[26] Understanding the power that my words have as they take up space in this thesis and within the field I am operating with, I choose to highlight and amplify Indigenous voices and words frequently and intentionally. For example, I have chosen the term "more-

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[24] Oded Balaban, "Praxis and Poesis in Aristotle's practical philosophy," The Journal of Value Inquiry 24, no. 3 (1990): 185.

[25] Brian Bourke, "Positionality: Reflecting on the research process," *The qualitative report* 19, no. 33 (2014): 3.

[26] N. Scott Momaday, "Personal Reflections," in *The American Indian and the Problem of History*, ed. Calvin Martin (New York: Oxford University press, 1987): 160.

than-human" or "more-than-human kin" to refer to animals, spiritual beings, and all beings which are not delineated as human. I have chosen "more-than-human" as opposed to "non-human" to reposition these beings with agency and importance equal or greater than humans. This works against a colonial human exceptionalism complex to amplify the sovereignty and agency of more-than-humans.

Turtle Island is the space now called the United States. I have chosen to use the term "Turtle Island" to recognize the inherent sovereignty and stewardship of these lands by Indigenous nations and more-than-human beings as opposed to the term "United States" created by settler colonists. Throughout Turtle Island, there are many Indigenous nations with many different languages, cultures, and customs. To assume Indigenous peoples throughout Turtle Island as a monolith is an active extension of settler colonialism. I recognize that the stories I have chosen to amplify throughout this thesis may apply to the nation they have come from and have no relationship to another Indigenous nation on Turtle Island. Rather, I am looking at how common threads within Indigenous nations' storytelling methods throughout Turtle Island are a practice of ceremony and decolonial methodologies. I have specifically chosen to use the self-determined terminology of "Indigenous Peoples." Specifically, around the "s" of "peoples". This "s" is crucial in avoiding erasure and forced assimilation. There are many different nations and different practices employed by different Indigenous Peoples distributed throughout what we now call the United States.

The Wabanaki Bioregion, the Dawnland, is now called Maine. I have chosen to use the term Maine, however, as it delineates the operations which are occurring directly in the settler state of Maine. This land is of Wabanaki stewardship. In this thesis, I am calling into action the apparatuses of the settler state directly, and therefore I use the term Maine and invoke, in each use, a critical lens of colonization and the oppressive, active, actions of the settler state upon the Wabanaki peoples and kin.

Throughout this project I will delineate various simultaneous dynamics of storytelling. They are all interwoven and crucial elements which do not exist in a vacuum of one another. For the sake of clarity, I have parsed them out and, in each chapter, I will examine just one method of storytelling. However, in truth, storytelling is a ceremony which is a decolonial.

Finally, I would like to again acknowledge the unceded lands of the Wabanaki peoples which I have written this thesis on and acknowledge the process of the honors thesis and the field of "English" in Western Euroversity throughout Turtle Island. This thesis serves, however, to offer methods which we can learn with/from Indigenous Storytelling in an attempt to grow and evolve English studies at Colby College and universities throughout Turtle Island.

Chapter 1: Indigenous Storywork as Decolonial Praxis

Eagle Poem by Joy Harjo

To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know there is more
That you can't see, can't hear;
Can't know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren't always sound but other
Circles of motion.
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky
In wind, swept our hearts clean
With sacred wings.
We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care
And kindness in all things.
Breathe in, knowing we are made of
All this, and breathe, knowing
We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon within a
True circle of motion,
Like eagle rounding out the morning
Inside us.
We pray that it will be done
In beauty.
In beauty.[27]

[27] Joy Harjo, "Eagle Poem," *Poetry Foundation*, 1990. https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46545/eagle-poem.

Indigenous Storywork (stories and storytelling) are practices of reciprocity that "sustain[] communities, validate[] experiences and epistemologies, express[] experiences of Indigenous peoples, and nurture[] relationships and the sharing of knowledge."[28] Since time immemorial, stories have been used as a praxis of reciprocity and collectivism within Indigenous communities, especially when working in reciprocity with the land. The "place-based nature of [Indigenous] religion and culture"[29] helps us to honor the symbiosis required of living on this earth. A place-based nature of understanding and living acknowledges that "many stories and teachings are gained from animals, plants, the moon, the stars, water, wind, and the spirit world. Knowledge is also gained from vision, ceremony, prayer, intuitions, dreams, and personal experience."[30] A nature/being reciprocity articulates that nature and land are not delineated from humanness- like in Joy Harjo's (Muscogee Creek) poem (which I have chosen as a guide quote and grounding poem for this chapter). The poem is an exploration of the relationship of nature and being as a praxis: "To pray you open your whole self/To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon/To one whole voice that is you."[31] Harjo explores this "collaborative nonhierarchical process"[32] of knowledge creation when she writes "We see you, see ourselves."[33] To "see you, see ourselves" articulates a collective

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[28] Judy Iseke, "Indigenous Storytelling as Research," International Review of Qualitative Research 6, no. 4 (2013): 559.
[29] Sarah Krakoff, "American Indians, climate change, and ethics for a warming world," Denver University Law Review, 85(4), 2008: 7.
[30] Deborah McGregor, "Coming Full Circle: Indigenous Knowledge, Environment and Our Future," American Indian Quarterly (2004): 388.
[31] Harjo, 1990.
[32] Randee Lipson Lawrence and Dennis Swiftdeer Paige, "What our ancestors knew: Teaching and learning through storytelling," *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 149, no. Spring (2016): 67.
[33] Harjo, 1990.

knowledge created through moments of reflexivity. This poem reflects how knowledge is produced collectively through storytelling, which is both a praxis of reflexivity and reciprocity. Indigenous storytelling is a praxis wherein "theory is no longer something in the abstract: we make sense of it through our stories."[34] However, storytelling does more than pass oral literature or oral histories through generations and communities; it nurtures knowledge, builds community consciousness, and sustains Indigenous worldviews.

Praxis

Storytelling in general is a praxis. Praxis is defined as "the use of a theory or a belief in a practical way."[35] Stories from around the globe and spanning timescapes are a praxis because they take a theory and put them into practice. The theory manifests in what the author writes—the underlying message—and the practice is sharing that story. The process of sharing stories allows for "shared background knowledge and interpersonal bonds... They may very well propel multiple perspective-taking, theory building and other complex cognitive skills."[36] As stories generate "multiple perspective-taking" and advance "complex cognitive skills" they become a lesson applied to both listener and storyteller. For example, in children's stories like *Charlotte's Web* and *The Giving Tree* the

[34] Lawrence and Paige, 67.
[35] "Praxis," Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2022).
[36] Elinor Ochs et al., "Storytelling as a Theory-building Activity," *Discourse Processes* 15, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 67.

message is often kindness or being a good friend.[37] As the reader is reading about the empathy and kindness of Wilbur and Charlotte, they are speaking aloud the lesson of the story: friendship and partnership requires time, work and kindness. The articulation of a message into spoken or read words is one form of praxis: the listener and teller both internalize a theory of kindness which they will extrapolate to their own life.[38]

Further, the messages/praxis of storytelling, once articulated, we hold in our minds and carry them throughout our lives. A praxis of storytelling is not instantaneous, but rather happens throughout our whole lives as we re-call the lessons we learned from stories. For example, Harjo's "Eagle Poem" teaches us about our purpose and temporariness on this earth: "Breathe in, knowing we are made of/All this, and breathe, knowing/We are truly blessed because we/Were born, and die soon" the poem asks.[39] Whether subconsciously or consciously, we breathe while we speak these lines. Speaking that we are "breath[ing], knowing we are truly blessed because we were born, and die soon" ties our active breathing with the meaning we make from the message Harjo related. However, because Harjo offers this lesson as a command rather than a question, there is no implied need for the reader's response. Instead, the peaceful message of knowing "We are truly blessed because we/Were born, and die soon" can linger in the minds and

[37] Mary Gormandy White, "25 Most Common Themes in Children's Literature," YourDictionary (2022), https://examples.yourdictionary.com/25-most-common-themes-childrens-literature.
[38] Michael F. Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin, "Stories of experience and narrative inquiry," Educational researcher 19, no. 5 (1990): 4.
[39] Harjo, 1990.

mouths of the storyteller and listener, allowing the theory of being at peace with our impermanence to become praxis—living in our brains, hearts, and bodies.

Differentiating Decolonial Praxis

The differences between western and Indigenous storytelling lies in the praxis each telling evokes, either intentionally or unintentionally. Take, for instance, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, a book written by settler Roald Dahl (unmarked), where Mr. Fox is clever and has to work against being killed by the farmers. This story's theory/messaging teaches readers to have compassion for animals, fictional or not. In the beginning of the story, Mr. Fox gets hurt by the hunters, and his injury is exacerbated by hunger: "There was no food for the foxes that night, and soon the children dozed off. Then Mrs. Fox dozed off. But Mr. Fox couldn't sleep because of the pain in the stump of his tail."[40] Here, the reader is tacitly asked to draw the connection between Mr. Fox getting hurt and the family not being able to eat, and further invited to feel pity or sadness for the fox family. This reading engenders a praxis of empathy, wherein the reader comes to understand that animals have feelings and emotions and hopefully goes on to practice increased kindness towards animals. The story works in this way because stories "tend to generate in the reader awareness of … characters' thoughts, beliefs, desires, and habits, in the webs of contingencies that constitute their life-worlds."[41]

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[40] Roald Dahl, and Quentin Blake, *Fantastic Mr. Fox*, London: Puffin Books, 1996: 15.
[41] Thomas E. Barone, "Beyond Theory and Method: A Case of Critical Storytelling," *Theory Into Practice* 31, no. 2 (1992): 142.

However, the story of the fox being hunted leaves the humans in the story in the position of power. The story ends with a scene of Boggis, Bruce and Bean (the hunters) waiting with their guns for Mr. Fox to come out of his hole, but the animals have outwitted the humans by digging away from them. Mr. Fox, from inside the hole, says:

> "'But who wants to go out, anyway; let me ask you that? We are all diggers, every one of us. We hate the outside. The outside is full of enemies. We only go out because we have to, to get food for our families. But now, my friends, we have an entirely new set-up. We have a safe tunnel leading to three of the finest stores in the world!'... 'We will make," said Mr. Fox, "a little underground village, with streets and houses on each side—separate houses for Badgers and Moles and Rabbits and Weasels and Foxes. And every day I will go shopping for you all. And every day we will eat like kings.' The cheering that followed this speech went on for many minutes."[42]

This ending implies that instead of fighting back, the animals have found peace through escape, by simply digging deeper into the ground. For the animals to survive they had to create an "entirely new set-up", away from the "outside" world, which they grow to "hate" because "the outside is full of enemies." In this ending, safety equates a "separat[ion]" of humans from "Badgers and Moles and Rabbits and Weasels and Foxes" implying an inability to co-exist between humans and animals, and also drawing on colonialist ideologies of ownership and, again, separation of all beings.

This entire final section of the story is filled with capitalist and nationalist rhetoric. To begin, consumerism is what brings these animals happiness. The foxes' (and rest of the animals) can rejoice because their tunnels, which they had

[42] Dahl and Blake, 79.

to create to be separate from humans, lead them "to three of the finest stores in the world!"[43] Although here the "stores" are likely food storages, the double-entendre should not be overlooked. Different from buying in a brick-and-mortar store- these stores for food constitute excess, constant surplus, and a lack of reciprocity (three glaring traits of capitalism). The animals' joy is cultivated through access to stores, to taking from these stores. This is a time in the story, like when Mr. Fox describes their living situation as being made up of "streets and houses" where the animals and their surroundings resemble human lifeways and traits. Anthropomorphic traits like shopping are a function of deep and assumed intrinsic capitalism of all species which is in fact only a phase within humanity's ~2-million-year inhabitants of earth,[44] emerging in the past 5-6 centuries.[45] Finally, the story evokes a strong nationalist, even xenophobic, tone as the fox claims "We hate the outside. The outside is full of enemies. We only go out because we have to, to get food for our families."[46] The use of the word "enemies" creates a tension between humans and animals, it represents them as antitheses rather than collaborators, like they are in Harjo's work, where she likens how the "eagle that Sunday morning/Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky/In wind, swept our hearts clean/With sacred wings."[47] Our hearts swept clean by an eagle is not just anti-separation but interconnectedness. An eagle lives inside of humans and humans

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[43] Dahl and Blake, 79.
[44] Smithsonian Magazine, "An Evolutionary Timeline of Homo Sapiens," Smithsonian.com (Smithsonian Institution, February 2, 2021).
[45] R. L. Heilbroner and Peter J. Boettke, "capitalism," Encyclopedia Britannica, February 24, 2023.
[46] Dahl and Blake, 79.
[47] Harjo, 1990.

inside the eagle, all "circled in blue sky/in wind"[48] a swirling compounding blur where all things in conjunction create our worlds.

The implied inherent separation of species, the anthropomorphism and consumerist tendencies, and the nationalist propaganda of this story is not unintentional. It is a praxis, instilled throughout western literature. If I am going to posit that Indigenous storytelling is able to articulate a praxis of symbiosis of nature and beingness because of a fundamental understanding that we all exist in/with/for/because of another being/land/water/animal, then I must also recognize the capitalist, colonial and nationalist traits which the United States systemically functions on and the fact that these traits are present in even what may be considered "merely" a children's story. Assuming that such stories are meaningful is exactly how these narratives get reproduced and repeatedly instill a mindset of not just separation over nature but hierarchy: wherein animals exist in nature and humans lord above them. This hierarchy is made geologically explicit in *Mr. Fox* because the animals retreat to borrows *below* ground. Due to human regimes of terror (hunting for sport), they are relegated, despite their biological development, to live out their days within the dark ground—while humans maintain ownership of all the space above ground.

[48] Harjo, 1990.

Decoloniality and the University

As my comparative analysis of Dahl and Harjo demonstrates, Indigenous storytelling is more than just praxis but a specifically decolonial praxis. Decoloniality "is a perspective, stance, and proposition of thought, analysis, sensing, making, doing, feeling, and being that is actional (in the Fanonian sense), praxistical, and continuing."[49] In Harjo's poem, decoloniality is embodied in the reflexive and relational "We see you, see ourselves and know/That we must take the utmost care/And kindness in all things."[50] Here Harjo bespeaks a praxis that sees others in ourselves in order to imagine futures otherwise, a "continuous work to plant and grow an otherwise despite and in the borders, margins, and cracks of the modern/colonial/capitalist/heteropatriarchal order."[51] This praxis is not theoretical, because using decolonization as a metaphor "turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation. The tracks walk all over land/people in settler contexts."[52] Nor is this praxis grounded in settler logics of separation and preservation; it is drawing on the symbiotics I have discussed throughout this chapter which upsets hierarchies and establishes an equity throughout all space and place.

The pedagogical work of Indigenous storywork cannot unfold in universities, despite all protestations to decolonizing these spaces, because of the

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[49] Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On decoloniality: Concepts, analytics, praxis*, Duke University Press, 2018: 100.
[50] Harjo, 1990.
[51] Mignolo and Walsh, 100.
[52] Tuck and Yang, 7.

"modern/colonial/capitalist/heteropatriarchal order"[53] universities operate under. These orders are the antithesis of decolonial work and praxis. The structure of education, specifically private higher education, is plagued with classrooms where hundreds of students face one lecturer at the front of the room and devote their time to simply absorbing the knowledge the professor has been required to master as part of their disciplinary tutelage. Each of these professors functions within their siloed department, in their designated academic building, separated from other fields of study, methodologies, and forms of inquiry. Students too become disciplinarily and cultural siloed, leaving class to return to fraternities and sororities, which bolster a heterosexual, upper class, and patriarchal hierarchy. These physical, intellectual, and cultural architectures disable collaboration and perpetuate a culture of domination. Specifically, the "male-dominated party atmosphere associated with the Greek system contributes to occurrences of sexual assault as well as a rape-supportive culture."[54] All the while, these institutions are operating on Indigenous land which has been stolen, which universities are profiting from. These same universities, of which only 5%[55] have a Native Studies department (many of which only offer minors or a few classes) and even fewer Indigenous faculty or scholars working on critical issues facing Indigenous

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[53] Mignolo and Walsh, 100.
[54] Kristen N. Jozkowski and Jacquelyn D. Wiersma-Mosley, "The Greek system: How gender inequality and class privilege perpetuate rape culture," Family Relations 66, no. 1 (2017): 94.
[55] Amanda Cassano, "Native Studies Programs," Association on American Indian Affairs, 2019. https://www.indian-affairs.org/native-studies-list.html.
National Center for Education Statistics, "Characteristics of Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions." Condition of Education, U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2022.

peoples. All of these are structures built upon colonial, white, heterosexual norms: the systemic power structures of patriarchal Euro-centric dominance.[56]

Because these orders structure Western university culture, "decolonization does not fit the demands and expectations of the Western Euroversity – it is alive and vibrant, being theorized and enacted in Indigenous communities around the globe through practices such as storytelling."[57] So, although I am using decolonization to describe Indigenous storywork, it is a praxis that operates outside of Western academia because it is incongruent with the violence of the aforementioned orders. Decolonization as a project is necessarily delineated from other anti-racist and social justice education attempts because it "wants something different than those forms of justice."[58] Decolonization seeks to re-indigenize our world and get rid of the specifically anti-Indigenous practices of settler colonialism, within which universities operate.[59]

In her use of cyclicality and reciprocal relationships to detail how all of life is one compounding and enmeshed textile, Harjo is uprooting settler colonialism in its "external" form. External colonialism "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

[56] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, et al., "Decolonising Philosophy," *Decolonising the University,* Pluto Press, 2018: 64.
[57] Aman Sium and Eric Ritskes, "Speaking Truth to Power: Indigenous Storytelling as an Act of Living Resistance," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 13.
[58] Tuck and Yang, 3.
[59] Tuck and Yang, 36.

world."[60] This is the same rupturing of relationships observed in Western Euroversity– where heteronormative worlds are prioritized over slowness, intentionality, and community. Harjo's *Eagle Poem* positions us all as beings with one another, whereas *Fantastic Mr. Fox* represents humans and animals as "enemies."[61] *Fantastic Mr. Fox* is infused with the messaging, subtle or not, that Western Euroversity is also portraying external colonialism where extraction and privilege are the dominating markers of success. The latter reflects western storytelling praxis, wherein humans and animals are separated, and we are asked to feel kindness towards animals as objects of our pity and not because of our inherent relationship with them. Indigenous storytelling, on the other hand, refuses capitalist and colonialist tendencies in its appreciation of symbiotic relationships, ethical relationship building, and community knowledge creation.

Circles and Cyclicality

"Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the Earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were."
- Black Elk, Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux[62]

Indigenous storytelling allows a decolonial praxis in how it reconceptualizes time and space. Stories flourish as they are passed

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[60] Tuck and Yang, 4.
[61] Dahl and Blake, 79.
[62] Patricia Petro, "Native American Symbolic Circles," *Inspiration for the Spirit*, 2002.

intergenerationally through space, and through time are adapted and retold with each storyteller. It is up to the storyteller, listener, reader, to infer how they will use this story as praxis. The story is thus a being in and of itself, one that transcends time and space and itself does not have an agenda, a predisposition, or a plan--they exist as pieces of knowledge we "can't know except in moments."[63]

Settler colonial timescapes, on the other hand, are linear, and organized around accumulation and growth: characters build towards a greater, more advanced future. As Lois J. Einhorn (unmarked) notes, "by viewing time as linear, Americans orient events at specific times. The use of linear time encourages Americans to equate the history of a family with its lineage and to separate past, present, and future, considering them distinct, separate entities on a continuum."[64] Such timescaping tends to leave pain and harm in the past, as something that is "overcome" on a journey towards a more "civilized" future. This functions to evade guilt or blame for *ongoing* harm. Since the first settler contact with Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island (what we call the United States), settlers have equated Indigeneity as the opposite of civilization, "as an antithesis to themselves,."[65] This perspective plots "civilization" on a linear track so that in story after story—from Mary Rowlandson's (unmarked) 1682 *Narrative of Captivity* to the 1992 *Last of the Mohicans* film—western settler states are seen as more advanced and developed than Indigenous nations. In this story that the west

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[63] Harjo, 1990.

[64] Lois J. Einhorn, *The Native American oral tradition: Voices of the spirit and soul*, Praeger, 2000: 14.

[65] Robert Berkhofer, *The white man's Indian: Images of the American Indian, from Columbus to the present*, Vol. 794, 1979: 29.

tells itself, time is segmented into moments on a timeline so that the violences of settler colonialism—land theft, genocide, resource extraction—are seen as over and finished. This leaves no space for healing from intergenerational trauma, appreciating evolutions through time or reparations for pain caused by generations before.

Indigenous storytelling offers us a very different orientation towards time. For instance, in *Eagle Poem* by Joy Harjo decoloniality emerges from the cyclical relationship of nature, land, and humanness. From this vantage humans are neither exceptional (Dahl's hunters) nor saviors (Dahl's readers). Instead, human being is interconnected:

> "To pray you open your whole self
> To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
> To one whole voice that is you.
> And know there is more
> That you can't see, can't hear;
> Can't know except in moments
> Steadily growing, and in languages
> That aren't always sound but other
> Circles of motion."[66]

The exceptionalism of human strength over animals in *Fantastic Mr. Fox* opposes the symbiosis of land and being that Harjo represents in the act of praying: we "open [our] whole self to sky, to earth, to sun, to moon to one whole voice that is you." Here Harjo is describing how the sky, earth, sun and moon are all aspects of humans because we are all pieces of the earth. This interconnectedness is a completely different way of understanding life than the one represented in

[66] Harjo, 1990.

Fantastic Mr. Fox, where the animals had to create a new way of life below humans, both literally and figuratively situating humans as superior and above animals.

Whereas the frameworks of superior/inferior, above/below structure Dahl's world, in Harjo cyclicality is our languages of knowing: "Can't know except in moments/Steadily growing, and in languages/That aren't always sound but other/Circles of motion."[67] For Harjo, cyclicality describes how ecosystems are interconnected and ties all beings from all times together. As Harjo writes, the eagle who "circled in blue sky/In wind, swept our hearts clean/With sacred wings."[68] The eagle is not merely within our hearts, but "our hearts" are also the blue sky, as the eagle's "sacred wings" sweep through both and again we "can't know except in moments/Steadily growing, and in languages/That aren't always sound but other/Circles of motion."[69] This reflects Indigenous place-based nature and human connections, where lands, waters, sky, humans, and animals are interwoven.

There is an openness to consciousness in Indigenous storytelling because it is understood as constantly shifting, changing, and constructed in moments. Harjo's poem also embodies this open consciousness in how it imagines futures otherwise. For example, she writes "there is more/That you can't see, can't hear;/Can't know except in moments" reflecting a humility and acceptance of not

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[67] Harjo, 1990.
[68] Harjo, 1990.
[69] Harjo, 1990.

knowing "except in moments." Not knowing "except in moments" is much more place based, both in time and space because it requires us to evaluate our time as just moments, and moments require a full examination of everything around us: where we are, who we are with, why we are aware of that moment. And if we can only know in moments, it means that each moment is preceded and followed by another moment- opening our consciousness to be created from all of time, not simply our past. So, even though we know in moments, it is the bending and enfolding of moments which make stories and memories, and if we just know in little moments here and there, we must bundle them all together, in any haphazard way, to create meaning. The moments we have are significant because they link to our other moments we will or have experienced. As Judy Iseke (Métis) writes, Indigenous storytelling is a "pedagogical witnessing," a "historical consciousness [that] functions to link a series of acts in community where knowledge is shared through revisiting the past."[70] A historical consciousness requires a symbiosis of the past and the present to create a web of time. This is the web that "can't [be] know[n] except in moments."[71] Since temporality is how we make sense of ourselves in time and space, if we can feel connected to other moments which have come before then we can build this historical consciousness because in telling stories we "implicate us all--to varying extents and in a range of ways--in this incredible period of loss."[72] Loss of histories, loss of species, loss of knowledge and lifeways. Stories, and cyclical time, are how we reconnect and

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[70] Iseke, 568.
[71] Harjo, 1990.
[72] Thom Van Dooren, "Flight ways," In Flight Ways, Columbia University Press, 2014: 146.

continue to learn and know in "circles of motion."[73] For Harjo—and within the decolonial praxis of Indigenous storywork--knowing comes from "steadily changing" moments, from languages "That aren't always sound but other/Circles of motion."[74] In contrast to Indigenous forms of consciousness (the movement, temporality and compounding of moments) - colonial knowledge systems fix knowledge systems into compartments.

Colonial knowledge systems compartmentalize knowledge—treating it as something that can be "kept" and "mastered." Mastery as a concept, specifically in education and university, "enforce[s] legacies of violence, erasure, and dehumanization on which the nation--and indeed our educational institutions--have been erected."[75] By siloing knowledge systems in university, and at large away from each other, and naming them as such to be mastered, there is a loss of collectivism and softness. What I mean here, is that by calling someone a master of something, it leaves only one path for the student/learner/listener. You must "master" a concept wholly and you must do so in a constrained amount of time and in a certain way. Such education "holds no room for 'sensitivity'"[76] because "at its root [it is] a colonizing gesture that casts education as a practice of subjecting others to the exclusive force of a firmly established hierarchy."[77]

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[73] Harjo, 1990.
[74] Harjo, 1990.
[75] Juliette Singh, *Unthinking mastery: Dehumanism and decolonial entanglements*, Duke University Press, 2017: 66.
[76] Singh, 67.
[77] Singh, 67.

The circularity of the creation story, specifically the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) creation story, is another example of the decolonial praxis of cyclicality seen throughout Indigenous storytelling. Through circular timescaping, anti-hierarchical successes and a community centered creation tale "everything the power of the world does is done in a circle."[78] While creation stories vary across Indigenous tribes, they often highlight the cyclicality of time. For instance, in the telling of the Anishinaabe Creation Story by Basil Johnston (Anishinaabe), we see the story of creation as a cycle of trial and error which illuminates the community collaboration that ebbs and flows with time in order to evolve:

> "Gladly, all the animals tried to serve the spirit woman. The beaver was the first to plunge into the depths. He soon surfaced out of breath and without the precious soil. The fisher tried, but he too failed. The marten went down, came up empty handed, reporting the water was too deep. The loon tried. Although he remained out of sight for a long time, he too emerged, gasping for air. He said that it was too dark. All tried to fulfill the spirit women's request. All failed. All were ashamed.
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> Finally, the least of the water creatures, the muskrat, volunteered to dive. At this announcement the other water creatures laughed in scorn, because they doubted this little creature's strength and endurance. Had not they, who were strong and able, been unable to grasp the soil from the bottom of the sea? How could he, the muskrat, the most humble among them, succeed when they could not?
>
> Nevertheless, the little muskrat volunteered to dive. Undaunted, he disappeared into the waves. The onlookers smiled. They waited for the muskrat to emerge as empty handed as they had done. Time passed. Smiles turned to worried frowns. The small hope that each had nurtured for the success of the muskrat turned into despair. When the waiting creatures had given up, the muskrat floated to the surface more dead than alive, but he clutched in his paws a small morsel of soil. Where the great had failed, the small succeeded."[79]

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[78] Black Elk, Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux from Patricia Petro, "Native American Symbolic Circles," Inspiration for the Spirit, 2002.
[79] Basil H. Johnston, "Ojibway Heritage," McClelland & Stewart, 1976: 14.

In the Anishinaabe story of creation, “multiple possible futures”[80] are explored for each of the animals, thereby producing a cyclical narrative. First, the animals all try in an order, but there is no implied linearity of each animal trying and failing. In fact, the muskrat, the least likely to succeed in the challenge, represents our provisional knowing and disrupting a linear storyline as he is the one to succeed. Linear time is further disrupted discursively, with phrases like “time passed,”[81] which in a western narrative may have been articulated as ‘later on,’ or ‘a few minutes later’. Time here is neither linear nor stagnant. This produces a feeling of timelessness “central to reciprocity [where] spirit exists both now and before, creation is both a historical and current event”: the interconnectedness of everything.[82] The muskrat’s emergence from the deep “more dead than alive” but nonetheless clutching “a small morsel of soil” manifests a humility which serves as the antithesis to the western mindset of power and conquest.[83] Rather than pride or individualism, the Anishinaabe story emphasizes the reciprocity of land, more-than-humans, and humans—all of whom work towards a commonness, failing and succeeding together. This is a true tonic to our contemporary moment. As Deborah McGregor (Anishinaabe) argues, “principles and values such as respect, coexistence, cooperation, honor, thanksgiving, reciprocity, balance and

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[80] Bridie McGreavy, Darren Ranco, John Daigle, et al. "Science in Indigenous homelands: addressing power and justice in sustainability science from/with/in the Penobscot River," Sustainability Science 16, no. 3 (2021): 941.
[81] Johnston, 14.
[82] Blossom, “Reciprocity in Aboriginal Society Principles of Interconnectedness,” Bachelor of Psychology, June 10, 2013, https://bpsych.wordpress.com/2013/06/10/reciprocity-in-aboriginal-society-principles-of-interconnectedness/.
[83] Johnston, 14.

harmony, and recognition of interrelationships among all of Creation are still very relevant and needed in contemporary times."[84]

While historical time telling, often through stories, is emblematic of all cultures, we see in the Anishinaabe creation story strongly contrasts colonial historiography, "a modernist project which has developed alongside imperial beliefs about the Other."[85] Colonial timescaping requires an "other" again which to define themselves as dominant. Conquest and subjugation of the "other" is thus built into European nation states' notions of progress. For instance, Columbus' invention of "Indian" as a category for otherness stemmed from his ignorance: he believed he was off the coast of Asia when he landed on Turtle Island. Perceiving difference as a "lack of white ways,"[86] he constituted Indigenous Peoples as an uncivilized "other" to the Europeans—a practice of naming and cataloging rooted in Euro-centricity that erases cultures, lifeways, and varied experiences in order to build hierarchy and assume a stance of power. As the British, Spanish, French, and Dutch began to colonize the land that today is called the United States, they reproduced the first settler's notion that "the Indian" was "a reverse or negative model of white life."[87] This carried the harmful rhetoric and relations into a new era of history making, where settler presumption to land pushed Indigenous Peoples out towards the frontier. Land and bounded territory are a central facet of western nation building, and if Indigenous Peoples are the "reverse" to this white

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[84] McGregor, 389.

[85] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Imperialism, history, writing and theory," Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples (2012): 31.

[86] Berkhofer, 26.

[87] Berkhofer, 27.

way of life, there cannot be a coexistence on the land. "Wild country" gets stolen in the name of "national renewal,"[88] representing Indigenous Peoples as lacking the skills or advancement to manage land (i.e. extract it, expand agricultural output, etc.).

We might say then that Indigenous storywork—through cyclicality--differentiates between time and temporality. Temporality is "the apprehension of becoming, which every human being accomplishes through his cognitive system in a cultural context" and time is "the phenomenon of becoming in itself, which the human being is capable of apprehending as temporality."[89] Separating time and temporality engenders an openness and creativity found in Indigenous storytelling. As Harjo says: "because we/Were born, and die soon within a/True circle of motion" we pray what we do is done "in beauty. In beauty."[90] By repeating the phrase "in beauty" twice, Harjo is uprooting a western idea of linear lifespans where when you die that is the end of your journey. She doesn't say "in beauty" one time as if that is the final resting place, but rather says it again to re-open creative futures where our "circle of motion" of life and death carries us. Time, place and being are all encapsulated in Indigenous temporality "such as slowing down, looking at the past to inform present actions, or envisioning"[91] futures otherwise.

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[88] William Cronon, *Landscape and Patchwork & Seasons of Want and Plenty, In Changes in the land: Indians, colonists, and the ecology of New England* (1sy ed.). New York: Hill and Wang. 1983: 12.
[89] Gonzalo Iparraguirre, "Time, temporality and cultural rhythmics: An anthropological case study," *Time & Society* 25, no. 3 (2016): 616.
[90] Harjo, 1990.
[91] McGreavy, et al., 941.

When colonial knowledge systems collapse time and space, they foreclose possibilities of creative potential interpretation. A strong counterexample to the Anishinaabe creation story is the Christian creation story. As I touched on earlier, Indigenous temporality in the Anishinaabe creation story builds on circular timescaping and community knowledge production. These three elements are what help to build creative possible futures. In the Christian creation story, there is one man, God, represented as white by Euro-western nations, in charge of making the entire world in a few days, consecutively building one off the other. For example, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep… And God said, Let there be light: and there was light."[92] In the Anishinaabe creation story, each of the animals is working in conjunction with/for the spirit woman, trying and failing, collectively building creation together. In Christianity, there is no opportunity for interpretation of time nor place because creation happened in an instant- God asked for light and there was light. There is no trial and error like the Anishinaabe creation story, there is no collectivism, it is just a reification of God's power. This forecloses creativity and future building and collapses upon time and space to siphon the story to a singular narrative where man (through God) is to be served and thanked for all creation.

Circles and circularity are thus more than a theme in Native storywork. They're a cosmology, a temporality, an equitable system of being, a relation between storyteller and listener that enable people "to engage with the stories and

[92] English Standard Version Bible, 2009, Genesis 1:1.

histories of families, communities, and cultures and to begin the transformative process of understanding oneself in relation."[93] The knowledge that emerges is thus "located in connection to the storytelling context and as such cannot be separated or generalized from the context."[94] In short, stories embody relationality and community and point towards celebration and ceremony. Indigenous stories implore us to seek reflexivity and reciprocity, which I will expand upon in the next chapter.

[93] Iseke, 573.
[94] Iseke, 573.

Chapter 2: Ceremony through Positionality and Reflexivity in Indigenous Storytelling

I have chosen to begin this chapter with the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Thanksgiving Address, also known as the Ganoñhéñ·nyoñ ("Words That Come before All Else").[95] This address embodies a positionality and reflexivity in the story because it recognizes our complicated temporality and earthliness. It begins with a statement of positionality and an "expression of gratitude for the gifts of life that have already been given."[96] I am offering the full, extended address in an active effort to capture the cyclicality throughout this address. Each segment of this address is intentional and unique and cannot exist in snippets.

"Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address Greetings to the Natural World"

The People

Today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue. We have been given the
duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things. So now, we bring our
minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as people.
Now our minds are one.

The Earth Mother

We are all thankful to our Mother, the Earth, for she gives us all that we need for life. She
supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she continues to care for us
as she has from the beginning of time. To our mother, we send greetings and thanks.
Now our minds are one.

The Waters

We give thanks to all the waters of the world for quenching our thirst and providing us with
strength. Water is life. We know its power in many forms- waterfalls and rain, mists and

[95] Gross and Arnold, 36.

[96] Lawrence William Gross and Phillip P Arnold, "'And Now Our Minds Are One,'" in *Native American Rhetoric* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2021): 31.

streams, rivers and oceans. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to the spirit of
Water.
Now our minds are one.

The Fish

We turn our minds to the all the Fish life in the water. They were instructed to cleanse and
purify the water. They also give themselves to us as food. We are grateful that we can still find.
pure water. So, we turn now to the Fish and send our greetings and thanks.
Now our minds are one.

The Plants

Now we turn toward the vast fields of Plant life. As far as the eye can see, the Plants grow,
working many wonders. They sustain many life forms. With our minds gathered together, we
give thanks and look forward to seeing Plant life for many generations to come.
Now our minds are one.

The Food Plants

With one mind, we turn to honor and thank all the Food Plants we harvest from the garden.
Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans and berries have helped the people
survive. Many other living things draw strength from them too. We gather all the Plant Foods
together as one and send them a greeting of thanks.
Now our minds are one.

The Medicine Herbs

Now we turn to all the Medicine herbs of the world. From the beginning they were instructed to
take away sickness. They are always waiting and ready to heal us. We are happy there are
still among us those special few who remember how to use these plants for healing. With one
mind, we send greetings and thanks to the Medicines and to the keepers of the Medicines.
Now our minds are one.

The Animals

We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to all the Animal life in the world.
They have many things to teach us as people. We are honored by them when they give up
their lives so we may use their bodies as food for our people. We see them near our homes
and in the deep forests. We are glad they are still here and we hope that it will always be so.

Now our minds are one.

The Trees

We now turn our thoughts to the Trees. The Earth has many families of Trees who have their
own instructions and uses. Some provide us with shelter and shade, others with fruit, beauty
and other useful things. Many people of the world use a Tree as a symbol of peace and
strength. With one mind, we greet and thank the Tree life.

Now our minds are one.

The Birds

We put our minds together as one and thank all the Birds who move and fly about over our
heads. The Creator gave them beautiful songs. Each day they remind us to enjoy and
appreciate life. The Eagle was chosen to be their leader. To all the Birds-from the smallest to
the largest-we send our joyful greetings and thanks.

Now our minds are one.

The Four Winds

We are all thankful to the powers we know as the Four Winds. We hear their voices in the
moving air as they refresh us and purify the air we breathe. They help us to bring the change
of seasons. From the four directions they come, bringing us messages and giving us strength.
With one mind, we send our greetings and thanks to the Four Winds.

Now our minds are one.

The Thunderers

Now we turn to the west where our grandfathers, the Thunder Beings, live. With lightning and
thundering voices, they bring with them the water that renews life. We are thankful that they
keep those evil things made by Okwiseres underground. We bring our minds together as one
to send greetings and thanks to our Grandfathers, the Thunderers.

Now our minds are one.

The Sun

We now send greetings and thanks to our eldest Brother, the Sun. Each day without fail he
travels the sky from east to west, bringing the light of a new day. He is the source of all the
fires of life. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Brother, the Sun.

Now our minds are one.

Grandmother Moon

We put our minds together to give thanks to our oldest Grandmother, the Moon, who lights the
night-time sky. She is the leader of woman all over the world, and she governs the movement
of the ocean tides. By her changing face we measure time, and it is the Moon who watches
over the arrival of children here on Earth. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our
Grandmother, the Moon.
Now our minds are one.

The Stars

We give thanks to the Stars who are spread across the sky like jewelry. We see them in the
night, helping the Moon to light the darkness and bringing dew to the gardens and growing
things. When we travel at night, they guide us home. With our minds gathered together as
one, we send greetings and thanks to the Stars.
Now our minds are one.

The Enlightened Teachers

We gather our minds to greet and thank the enlightened Teachers who have come to help
throughout the ages. When we forget how to live in harmony, they remind us of the way we
were instructed to live as people. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to these
caring teachers.
Now our minds are one.

The Creator

Now we turn our thoughts to the Creator, or Great Spirit, and send greetings and thanks for all
the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on this Mother Earth. For all
the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest
words of greetings and thanks to the Creator.
Now our minds are one.

Closing Words

We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named,
it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each
individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way.

Now our minds are one.[97]

Introduction (Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address)

Western cultures tend to define ceremony as "a formal religious or public occasion, typically one celebrating a particular event or anniversary."[98] Some common examples include marriage and death ceremonies, celebrations of birthdays or work accomplishments. This approach to ceremony as "celebrating a particular event or anniversary,"[99] rigidifies ceremony, which Sam Wilson (Cree) defines as "build[ing] stronger relationships or bridg[ing] the distance between our cosmos and us."[100] This chapter seeks to examine how specifically Indigenous stories are a ceremony, and contain aspects of true humility, community and openness which are lacking in other storyways.

Ceremony evokes the past as we honor what got us to the point of ceremony, and as such one major form of ceremony is storytelling. Tamarack Song (unmarked) says that Indigenous stories are a "unique communion with the Circle of Life,"[101] they "introduce the full range of human emotions. They invite listeners to laugh, to cry, to awaken, to journey with others."[102] As Judy Iseke says, in "storytelling and ceremonial life, we are involved in the lifeways of a people, culture, community, family, and tradition, and in it we make a new story

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[97] [English version: John Stokes and Kanawahienton (David Benedict), Mohawk version: Rokwaho (Dan Thompson)]. "Thanksgiving Address : Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else." Corrales, N.M. : Native Self-Sufficiency Center, 1993.
[98] "ceremony, n.". OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press.
[99] "ceremony, n.". OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press.
[100] Shawn Wilson, "Research as ceremony: Articulating an Indigenous research paradigm," PhD diss., Monash University, 2004: 10.
[101] Lois J. Einhorn, "The Native American oral tradition: Voices of the spirit and soul," Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2000: xi.
[102] Einhorn, 78.

today of our connections."[103] Indigenous storytelling is thus the ceremony of the "people, culture, community, family, and tradition" that it evokes, and as such it spans timescapes and expands on possible futures.

Ceremonies "may be seen as a way to bring relationships closer together: to engage in ritual in order to achieve enlightenment."[104] Reciprocity, reflexivity and celebration are ways to bring relationships to center view and engage rituals on a path to understanding, grieving, and celebrating. The "values and benefits of [ceremony]—such as sharing knowledge, investing resources, and making decisions—flow in both directions."[105] Ceremonies are a celebration of "the values and benefits"[106] which are made evident through identity. We see this in storytelling, which requires balancing reciprocity and reflexivity between teller and listener, a symbiosis of sharing and receiving. Indigenous storytelling is thus a ceremony as it celebrates and generates reciprocity and reflexivity, which strengthens the connection "to our cosmos" in a way that western storytelling often doesn't hold space for.

The Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address exemplifies a circular togetherness through ritualistic repetition and community centered gratitude. By using "we" and "our" "plants/air/moon" the Haudenosaunee create a connectedness to each other on an even plane, all in gratitude to the greater things

[103] Iseke, 573.
[104] Wilson, viii.
[105] Kevin Donner et al., "The 7 R's of Integrating Tribal and Indigenous Partnerships into Aquaculture Literacy," National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, August 12, 2021, https://www.noaa.gov/office-education/stories/7-r-s-of-integrating-tribal-and-indigenous-partnerships-into-aquaculture-literacy.
[106] Donner et al., 2021.

in the "cosmos."[107] "We" and "our" are repeated throughout the entire address, "We see [stars] in the night" and medicine herbs were "always waiting and ready to heal us."[108] The ceremony of the Haudenosaunee story practices collaborative thanksgiving in a way that evokes a similar experience to Harjo's Eagle Poem– where humans are made up of and owe gratitude to the animals, plants and more-than-humans of the world. Both Harjo's work and the Haudenosaunee begin with an appreciation and understanding for the cycles of life around us: the Haudenosaunee begins with "today we have gathered and we see that the cycles of life continue."[109] Harjo writes that we "were born, and die soon within a/True circle of motion."[110] Both of these Indigenous stories tell of a cycle of life where all beings "[] sky, [] earth, [] sun, [] moon"[111] share a "duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things."[112] For example, "we give thanks to our Grandmother, the moon."[113] This is true reciprocity (the "mutual recognition by two parties of certain rights and privileges"[114]) and also as the

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[107] Wilson, viii.
[108] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[109] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[110] Harjo, 1990.
[111] Harjo, 1990.
[112] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[113] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[114] "reciprocity, n.". OED Online. March 2023. Oxford University Press. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/159546?redirectedFrom=reciprocity.

speaker says these words of gratitude it is a spoken reflection on how the water, the sun, the earth all helped to create her.[115]

Indigenous storytelling, as a community building and nurturing practice, is a ceremony of connection. As Terry Tafoya says: "every time we tell a story it's a ceremony." In this chapter, I will focus on the reciprocity of the listener and teller, the reflexivity present in community story experiences and finally, I will talk about the necessity of positionality, specifically through relationships. These aspects of togetherness and ceremony reflect true decolonial praxis, unlike western forms of storytelling. I close with a discussion of how we can continue to bring these praxes into research.

Reflexivity and Reciprocity

Reciprocity

Indigenous storytelling is a practice of reciprocity "based on an understanding of social, ecological, and spiritual interconnectedness that supports the vitality of communities,"[116] which illuminates the mutually beneficial relationships of all beings, lands, waters since time immemorial. As I touched on earlier, the use of "our" throughout the entirety of the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address builds a community that is becoming and sustaining a

[115] *I use the pronouns she/her in an active attempt at shifting of the generic pronoun, typically "he". Rematriation is a process of return of relationships re:land, but I think it extrapolates to language here. Rematriation is "an Indigenous feminist paradigm, an embodied praxis of recovery and return, and a sociopolitical mode of resurgence and refusal." (Gray, 2022). Let us "recover" and "return" to why we fall to masculine pronouns, and change.*

[116] "Reciprocity," Indigenous Art and Arctic Ecology, University of Delaware, Accessed January 18, 2023. https://sites.udel.edu/arcticartecology/reciprocity/.

relationship with our cosmos.[117] However, simultaneously with the togetherness of "our" and "we", the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address individually thanks each facet which supports life and appreciates the whole of each plant, the air, moon, water, etc. By acknowledging how each being uniquely supports life, the story represents humans as just one piece of the puzzle, as worthy of appreciation as plants, air, moon, water, etc. For example, because "we have been given the duty to live in balance and harmony with each other and all living things" the Haudenosaunee address opens with: "So now, we bring our minds together as one as we give greetings and thanks to each other as people." The "we" who speak this address, as well as the "I" who reads it, interpret both the lesson of collective duty and the "greetings and thanks to each other as people."[118] Although this could be interpreted as needing to lift more-than-human beings to human status because of an "inherent moral inferiority"[119] (a concept prevalent in western literature) I posit that this is another strategy of the Haudenosaunee verbalizing the "duty to live in balance and harmony"[120] with all beings on/with this planet and beyond. So, by sending "greetings and thanks to each other as people"[121] the address individually recognizes the power to sustain each other that each of these more-than-beings carry and hold in equal regard. This is a decolonial praxis of

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[117] Wilson, viii.
[118] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[119] Lucius Caviola, Stefan Schubert, et al., "Humans first: Why people value animals less than humans," Cognition 225 (2022).
[120] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[121] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.

true reciprocity: where being holds an equal responsibility and power in sustaining one another– an interdependence of shared vulnerabilities.

The Spoken Word

Russel Boham (Chippewa) says that when "conceived in the mind and born with the breath of life, what I say to you is sacred. These words are my creation, but always they are my responsibility."[122] The spoken word holds "responsibility" in a way the written word of the colonialist settler doesn't. In the Haudenosaunee address, the spoken address to Mother Nature, to the Trees, to Animals, becomes "born with the breath of life" and becomes a verbal manifestation of gratitude and humility. Thanks, coming from the mind, are spoken to the Grandmother Moon. The address says: "She is the leader of woman all over the world, and she governs the movement of the ocean tides. By her changing face we measure time, and it is the Moon who watches over the arrival of children here on Earth. With one mind, we send greetings and thanks to our Grandmother, the Moon."[123] Storytelling, the spoken word, offers a further embodied experience of knowledge through use of the mouth, brain, lips, tongue, and body movements: this collective and full body experience is absent in the written word. The spoken word must also be adapted to fit the narrative the listener needs, in order to stay with the listener, to "sink deep into his heart"[124] where it will remain.

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[122] Einhorn, 4.
[123] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[124] Einhorn, 57.

The appreciation for the written word in western stories contrasts the weight placed on the spoken word in Indigenous storytelling. Four Guns (Lakota) once judged the settler reliance on the written word when he said "the Indian needs no writings; words that are true sink deep into his heart where they remain; he never forgets them. On the other hand, if the white man loses his papers, he is helpless."[125] Words on a piece of paper don't "sink deep" because they are tied to a piece of paper, there is not a temporality implied in the words. There is no repetition, there is no community praxis. What I mean here is that if temporality insinuates our beingness in time and space- written words surpass that. When you speak, your voice literally creates waves which ripple around you.[126] These words are absorbed by the people or beings around you physically creating temporal disturbances. Written words, while yes are created in time and space, do not always hold this physical temporal disruption.

We see such superficiality in the history of treaty breaking on Turtle Island. Throughout the 19th century, treaties that ceded land to the United States were broken, disregarded, and weaponized against Indigenous Peoples. These treaties were frequently signed by Indigenous ancestors in exchange for a "commitment that they'd [Indigenous nations] be able to fish, hunt and gather at all their 'usual and accustomed' places in perpetuity"[127] as a shared agreement to maintain lands; but these agreements were not maintained by settler states. The

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[125] Spoken by Four Guns, from Einhorn 57.
[126] Carl E. Seashore, "New approaches to the science of voice," *The Scientific Monthly* 49, no. 4 (1939).
[127] Jan Hasselman, "A New Front in the Battle against Coal Exports: Treaties," Earthjustice, June 27, 2019, https://earthjustice.org/blog/2015-july/a-new-front-in-the-battle-against-coal-exports-treaties.

Treaty of New Echota, for instance, removed Cherokee people from their "ancestral lands" through forced military removal (1835).[128] The Treaty of Point Elliott (1855) was broken with the Gateway Pacific Terminal project proposed in 2011, which would operate to extract coal without regard for the treaty's purpose of lifeway preservation. The Fort Laramie Treaty (1868) was broken when gold was discovered in Fort Laramie, Wyoming; miners and settlers moved onto the land and started extraction.[129] It was then re-broken with the Dakota access pipeline. Article II of the Fort Laramie Treaty "guarantees the 'undisturbed use and occupation' of reservation lands surrounding the proposed location of the Dakota access pipeline."[130] This history exemplifies the disregard for written promises and agreements and a historical denial of written contracts. Considering this track record, the white settler written word loses all credibility.

Reflexivity and Reflection

There is a Cherokee story called "The Story of Two Wolves." The story has many different iterations and names, some others are "The Wolves Within," "Which One Do You Feed?", "Grandfather Tells" and "The Tale of Two Wolves."[131] Regardless of how it is titled, the story demonstrates the power of reflexivity in Indigenous storytelling through its "multiplicity of reality, where

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[128] Sarah Pruitt, "Treaties Brokered-and Broken-with Native American Tribes," History.com (A&E Television Networks, November 10, 2020), https://www.history.com/news/native-american-broken-treaties.
[129] Pruitt, "Treaties Brokered-and Broken-with Native American Tribes."
[130] "Standing Rock Sioux and Dakota Access Pipeline: Teacher Resource," Native Knowledge 360, Smithsonian Institution, 2018.
[131] Logan Kine, "The Cherokee Two Wolves Story and the Power of Mindset." Clarity Clinic, October 16, 2020. https://www.claritychi.com/the-cherokee-two-wolves-story-and-the-power-of-mindset/.

both the spiritual and physical realms are interconnected with the ultimate aim of giving recognition to indigenous knowledge systems and ways of knowing."[132] The story describes a grandfather explaining to his grandson that there are two wolves fighting inside of him. The conversation is as follows:

"I have a fight going on in me," the old man said. "It's taking place between two wolves. One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego."

The grandfather looked at the grandson and went on. "The other embodies positive emotions. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. Both wolves are fighting to the death. The same fight is going on inside you and every other person, too."

The grandson took a moment to reflect on this. At last, he looked up at his grandfather and asked, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee gave a simple reply. 'The one you feed.'"[133]

First, this story is a reflection of the inherent interwovenness of humans and nature: as such it reflects the decolonial praxis of reflexivity, where one examines one's own beinghood. I am examining "reflexivity" as an interrogation of "not only on the self, how the self-works, and how others are implicated by the self and the self's desires, but also on how we represent—in writing, performance, film, and so on—the process and challenges of reflection."[134] The grandfather has two wolves inside of him, "implicating" both the grandfather and the wolves. Inherently, this representation transcends the colonial binary between humanness and nature. The two become fused in an act of disruptive pedagogy which reflects

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[132] Kwame, 219.

[133] "The Cherokee Two Wolves Story and the Power of Mindset."

[134] Tony E. Adams and Stacy Holman Jones, "Telling stories: Reflexivity, queer theory, and autoethnography," *Cultural Studies? Critical Methodologies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 111.

the understanding that humans and nature are intrinsically one. What's more, representing the wolf as a locus of emotion disrupts the colonial discourses of animality through which settlers presume themselves more emotionally elevated than non-humans. In this rendition, however, the wolf is the carrier of "joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith."[135] If the typical western philosophy is that "humans possess (or typically possess) morally valuable properties that animals lack"[136] then having an animal (wolf) represent these humanistic emotions also represents them as having moral value, which they almost never do in western literature. This is an example of reflexivity akin to what we see in the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address, where humans and more-than-humans share the same physical and meta-physical space. It's the process of seeing animals in humans and humans in animals that builds this praxis.

Reflexivity allows for a recognition of compounding realities to create how we interpret reality and imagine possible futures otherwise. As the wolf lives within the human and the human lives within the wolf, reflexivity here is "recognizing multiple realities [and] complicates assumptions about cause-and-effect relationships and challenges linear determinism, especially for imagining possible futures."[137] "Possible futures" are a decolonial praxis of expanding time, space and beingness to encompass everything and nothing. They are expansive of how western time imagines the future as a continuation of the present (linear

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[135] "The Cherokee Two Wolves Story and the Power of Mindset."
[136] Lucius Caviola, Stefan Schubert, et al., "Humans first: Why people value animals less than humans," Cognition 225 (2022): 2.
[137] McGreavy et al., 940.

determinism) because they allow for a compounding understanding of realities. Western time creates a linear determinism where each moment must build off of a past moment, whereas Indigenous future building is cyclical and constitutive. We see these multiple realities again in the Haudenosaunee address, where thanking the animals looks like:

> "They have many things to teach us as people. We are honored by them when they give up their lives so we may use their bodies as food for our people. We see them near our homes and in the deep forests. We are glad they are still here and we hope that it will always be so. Now our minds are one."[138]

This quote examines possible futures as it appreciates the gift of giving up life for others prosperity and decenters humanity within life cycles. The first future is through the honoring of "when they give up their lives so we may use their bodies as food for our people."[139] This futurity examines life for life, understanding prosperity of one (humans being fed) builds from a prosperity of the other (a healthy life of the animal). The second instance of futurity is within a decentering of human life– "We are glad [animals] are still here and we hope that it will always be so."[140] By saying "still here" and "hope that it will always be so" the presence of animals transcends human time on this earth because the animals are "still" here, not "here with us" or "here for us"; the animals are simply "still" here and it is implied they have been here before, during, and after the time where the humans are here, too. Further, "we hope that it will always be so" offers a

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[138] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[139] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.
[140] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.

humility from the Haudenosaunee. The language of "hope" and "always be so" is an imagined future where the animals are still prosperous, and the hope that the animals will always be here could be for the humans to continue to have this reciprocal relationship or it could be a hope that their lives continue beyond humans'. I don't think there is only one way to interpret this hope, but that is the point of imaginative futures. The story allows for an appreciation and collective imagination for how these beings will continue to persist. With storytelling, listeners can "travel the world in human and nonhuman form. They become animals, trees, oceans, and rocks, and each of these creature beings speaks with each other with ease."[141] Circles of everything in this world working with and for each other and fighting within one another and nurtured by yet another.

Secondly, this story reminds the listener and teller that emotions are bigger than humanness. The grandfather in the story shares that of the two wolves,

> "One is evil – he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego… The other embodies positive emotions. He is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith."[142] This moment recognizes that negative emotions live within us all, but the ones that flourish are the "one[s] you feed."[143]

"Fighting to the death" is thus not suggesting that one set of emotions will win out, but rather than the fight will continue until the death of the human carrier. The multiple beings (both the positive: "joy, peace, love, hope" and the negative: "sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance")[144] is an introspective reflection of self, not a

[141] Einhorn, 78.
[142] "The Cherokee Two Wolves Story and the Power of Mindset."
[143] "The Cherokee Two Wolves Story and the Power of Mindset."
[144] "The Cherokee Two Wolves Story and the Power of Mindset."

fantasy where the self holds only goodness. Russell-Mundine (unmarked) suggests that "reflexivity involves self-scrutiny and can lead to self-discovery and insight."[145] Self-scrutiny means recognizing that rather than trying to convince yourself of only being positive, understanding your own shortcomings and then you will be unable to reach self-discovery. Self-scrutiny in this story creates an expansive reflexivity, one for the grandfather, the grandson, and the teller as all three reflect on the wolves which are inside of us.

Storytelling is like "borrowing other people's eyes, ears, and bodies. They connect listeners with males and females, old and young, animals and spirit beings, and beings of different times and cultures."[146] We can borrow each other's eyes and ears as we share stories written or told by others, specifically if they are stories which honor community relationality and positionality. The Story of Two Wolves is a practice of reflexivity because it calls upon worlds bigger than our own, wherein the storyteller is responsible for demonstrating "the nature of thoughts, the nature of reality, how knowledge is gained"[147] through the imagery of a wolf and the multiplicity of beings who create us.

Positionality

Positionality functions both as a methodology and as a decolonial praxis in Indigenous storytelling. Understanding positionality requires an acknowledgment

[145] Russell-Mundine, 87.
[146] Einhorn, 78.
[147] Hurley and Jackson, 41.

of "intersecting social locations and complex power dynamics."[148] If decolonization re-Indigenizes, then an explicit understanding of how one exists within intersecting "social locations" and "power dynamics" is a crucial facet of this praxis. For instance, in the Lakota legend, "Why the Leaves Fall" the reader is not simply reading the story, but re-stating the reasoning behind why the leaves fell off of trees:

> "Grass and flower folk were in sad condition, for they had no protection from the sharp cold," and so the creator came and said that "the leaves of the trees should fall to the ground, spreading a soft, warm, blanket over the tender roots of the grass and flowers. To repay the trees for the loss of their leaves, he allowed them one last bright array of beauty."[149]

Positionality in telling of this story manifests in the teller's explaining *why* the trees changed by gesturing to a cyclical timescaping and a general suspension of positionality. Suspending positionality creates a unanimous narrative we tell. In this tale, it manifests as centering the "grass and flower folk" as agents who are in a "sad condition" and feel and respond to the warmth of the fallen leaves. This articulates the mutuality with which the grass, flowers and trees are living—a story about nature from a human telling without a human savior. Humanness and human positionality (including the positionality of the teller) takes a backseat, which centers more-than-human beings; a nod to the reciprocity of the world that exists around us without any interference from humans.

[148] "Positionality & Intersectionality," CTLT Indigenous Initiatives, University of British Columbia, 2017.
[149] Lakota Legend, "Why the Leaves Fall," American Indian Legends, accessed 2022, https://www.firstpeople.us/FP-Html-Legends/WhyTheLeavesFall-Lakota.html.

In western storytelling, positionality is refracted. Settler colonial societies "desire[] to erase - to let time do its thing and wait for the older form of living to die out."[150] There is no relationality, rather it offers a logic that separates nature from humanity as an entirely separate ecosystem. For instance, "Goodnight Moon" by Margaret Wise Brown (unmarked) is told from the perspective of a little boy, who passively erases his positionality, saying "Goodnight bears goodnight chairs/Goodnight mittens and goodnight kittens."[151] This story, like much western storytelling, individualizes: one little boy, away from the world and in his room, saying goodnight to the objects stored in that space—and to the moon. His saying "goodnight chairs" makes it seem as though this book, and the ritual of saying goodnight, is specifically written for one person. And that person is a child who is tucked in their bed, separate from nature, with the privilege of time and space to read books before going to sleep. There is no sense of interrelatedness with any beings aside from their own, the reader exists in a space where when they are ready for bed, they must say goodnight to all of the things they want to sleep, too: "kittens," "mittens," "bears," etc. This is a demonstration of erased positionality because it represents the reproduction of knowledge as a process that occurs in a singular place (this boy's bed) with a singular message (the human's schedule comes first and the world revolves around them and their sleep). Another example of the lack of positionality is the adjunct nature of this story as compared to the Lakota legend. In the legend the positionality of the

[150] Tuck and Yang, 9.
[151] Margaret Wise Brown, et al., *Goodnight moon*, New York: HarperTrophy, 1947: 9-12.

Creator, the trees and the ground is glaring as the creator acknowledges the sadness of the trees to lose their leaves, even though it is beneficial for the ground and flowers, so to "repay the trees for the loss of their leaves, he allowed them one last bright array of beauty." In contrast, in *Goodnight Moon* the "kittens" are likely stuffed animals, "chairs" made from trees, "mittens" made of wool– an atomization of the natural world which is reassembled in this child's bedroom where the child is the only "natural" being, the only being with a recognized positionality.

But when positionality is acknowledged, like in "Why the Leaves Fall," above, storytelling can index collaborative knowledge making. For example, in "Eagle Poem," Harjo writes "We are truly blessed because we/Were born, and die soon within a/True circle of motion,/Like eagle rounding out the morning/Inside us."[152] Harjo explores a collective positionality here. "We" are blessed because "we" are born and die. The eagle is rounding inside of "us." The shared, spoken positionality creates a collectivist understanding of knowledge and experience. When there is a story explaining the behavior of the land, and the positionality of the storyteller is adopted by the listener or reader, nature surpasses humanity in importance. The reader transcends time and place, crumbling the "desire to erase"[153] and re-bringing this tale to contemporary being. By bringing stories through time and space in the form of a suspension of positionality, no "I," "We," or "Us" in the story, the story is a mode of decolonial resistance and praxis which

[152] Harjo, 1990.
[153] Tuck and Yang, 9.

expands beyond humanness and posits the agency and beingness of nature and land. This recenters a relationality of all beings, transcendent of time or place.

Another tool of positionality is self-location. In "The Cherokee Two Wolves Story and the Power of Mindset" also offers a ceremonial introspection in each line. For example, the story uses multiple tenses which allows the lessons of the story to be transcendent of time. Also, when the speaker articulates "I have a fight going on in me," it can recall the grandfather's fight or any fight which any teller of the story may have experienced. In telling and retelling, this story becomes emblematic of a humility and commonness emerging from reflecting on the fact that our internal fights are bigger than us, they are cosmic. This positionality is another "self-location" tool, which Kwame identifies as one of the most critical tools to true reflexivity. Self-locating is "a relational placing.. [it] enables others to locate us, and also offers the opportunity to explore how [we] will influence and be influenced by the research process."[154] Often found in research, the term is applicable to this story as each character is involved in a "relational placing"- we "see you, see ourselves"[155] in the wolves, grandson, grandchild. Towards the end of the story there is a moment of self-location for the teller/listener of the story as they narrate that "the grandson took a moment to reflect on" the story his grandfather told him. Speaking the phrase "took a moment to reflect on," and potentially pausing in the oration of the story, invites the listener to take their own moment of reflection to consider how their two

[154] Kwame, 218.
[155] Harjo, 1990.

wolves may be in conflict. Positionality, identified through self-location or through shared reflexivity in any capacity, celebrates storytelling to create ceremony.

(Absence of) Positionality through Objectivism, Masculinity and Place

Typically, in Indigenous storytelling, there is a celebration of land and more than human beings because "the land is more than a backdrop, space, or a location; it is a sustainer, speaker, and archive for Indigenous stories." In western story sequences, the land becomes a setting. A place for which a more important event takes place. A "backdrop". The following story comes in poem form and is a Dine song. It exemplifies intentionality, humility, and a reciprocity with the earth powerfully. It is as follows:

"It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed.
I, I am the spirit within the earth ...
The feet of the earth are my feet ...
The legs of the earth are my legs ...
The bodily strength of the earth is my strength ...
The thoughts of the earth are my thoughts ...
The voice of the earth is my voice ...
The feather of the earth is my feather ...
All that belongs to the earth belongs to me ...
All that surrounds the earth surrounds me ...
I, I am the sacred words of the earth ...
It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed."[156]

This Dine song both tells a story about the power of the earth and manifests that power within the singer. Spoken declarations of the self like "the feet of the earth are my feet" and "the legs of the earth are my legs" celebrate the power of the speaker and the earth, alongside each other. All which culminates as:

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[156] Dine Song from Einhorn, 109.

“All that surrounds the earth surrounds me … I, I am the sacred words of the earth.”

Many traditions of western storytelling lack such humility, which is present in Indigenous storytelling in the form of gratitude towards our temporality and time on/with this earth. For example, the Dine singer says that “It is lovely indeed, it is lovely indeed. I, I am the spirit within the earth.”[157] By contrast, the following excerpt is from John Muir’s (unmarked) (a conservationist of the 19th century)[158] accounts of California mountains reflect a settler relationship towards the earth. Muir was an environmentalist and naturalist, whose work is now widely adapted and acknowledged as some of the most influential nature writing. Yet unlike the nature writing in the Dine song, which claims humans as “spirit[s] within the earth,” Muir’s work exhibits the patriarchal, colonial mindset of white human power over the earth. In what follows, Muir describes his time in the California mountains and his encounters with the lakes, trees, mountains and with Indigenous nations:

> “Lakes are seen gleaming in all sorts of places round, or oval, or square, like very mirrors; others narrow and sinuous, drawn close around the peaks like silver zones, the highest reflecting only rocks, snow, and the sky. But neither these nor the glaciers, nor the bits of brown meadow and moorland that occur here and there, are large enough to make any marked impression upon the mighty wilderness of mountains. The eye, rejoicing in its freedom, roves about the vast expanse, yet returns again and again to the fountain-peaks. Perhaps some one of the multitude excites special attention some gigantic castle with turret and battlement, or some Gothic cathedral more abundantly spired than Milan's. … Then, penetrate the wilderness where you may, the main telling features, to which all the surrounding topography is subordinate, are quickly perceived, and the most complicated clusters of peaks stand revealed harmoniously correlated

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[157] Einhorn, 93.

[158] John Muir, “John of the mountains”: The unpublished journals of John Muir, Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1979.

> and fashioned like works of art eloquent monuments of the ancient ice-rivers that brought them into relief from the general mass of the range."[159]

Unlike the Dine song, which is written in active voice, Muir writes in passive voice, which works to separate the human articulating the encounter from the natural landscape he is encountering. "Lakes are seen gleaming" and "the eye" looks out at the vast expanse–here Muir is separate from the world he is ogling. In this rendition, the lakes have no agency, they exist instead to gleam <u>for</u> man's eye, a vision that "penetrate[s] the wilderness." Muir ocular-centrism is patriarchal, forcibly penetrating what he deems subordinate. In this orientation towards the California landscape, Muir reinforces a white male hierarchy over nature, which dovetails with the feminization of nature, where nature was seen as open for the taking (think the Great Chain of Being[160] and Manifest Destiny[161]). Nature, through the lens of the white male colonizer, is subordinate, like they presume women to be. Thus, the phalli-centric interpretation of all the "topography [as] subordinate" to the large "mighty wilderness of mountains."[162]

Muir, of course, naturalizes this phallic and patriarchal interpretation by ascribing these characteristics to nature itself, which anthropomorphizes the landscape in a way that reflects settler values. So, the flatter and surrounding "topography is subordinate" to the "most complicated clusters of peaks."[163] What

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[159] John Muir, "Mount Ritter," in The Mountains of California (Boston, MA: Mifflin, 1911).
[160] Britannica, Editors of Encyclopedia, "Great Chain of Being," Encyclopedia Britannica, December 10, 2021.
[161] D. S. Heidler, and Jeanne T. Heidler, "Manifest Destiny," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 5, 2022.
[162] Muir, "Mount Ritter."
[163] Muir, "Mount Ritter."

rises physically above, what the eye must "penetrate" is thus superior to the lakes, glaciers, and valleys around it, none of which make any marked impression."[164]

This assigns a human, colonial hierarchy to the grand mountains as they stand. The large expanse is subordinate because it is flat, also because it is home to many. The mountains are ascribed a harshness, valued within the very gendered binary that valuates phallic size. Within this binary the flatland is feminine, nurturing, and yet still none "are large enough to make any marked impression upon the mighty wilderness of mountains."[165] Masculinity is praised because of its harshness and power and the flatland is feminine because of its softness. Attacking the flatland, then, is not coincidental but rather because of the fear of the power of femininity– a gendered, sexist attack. Erin Marie Konsmo (Métis Prairie) writes about how women are attacked by climate change as they are the homes of nations, twinning colonization of nature and women as well as highlighting the disparate effects of climate violence on Indigenous women. She writes: "The reason women [are] attacked is because women carry our clans and...by carrying our clans, are the ones that hold that land for the next generation. That's where we get our identity as nations. So if you destroy the women, you destroy the nations, and then you get access to the land."[166] Therefore, when Muir is criticizing the land because of its lack of masculine attributions, he is also attacking the hospitality of the non-mountains land as a

[164] Muir, "Mount Ritter."
[165] Muir, "Mount Ritter."
[166] Erin Marie Konsmo and Kahealani Pacheco, "Violence on the land, violence on our bodies: Building an Indigenous response to environmental violence," Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, (2016): 2.

space of species building, reproduction and community. By saying that the true beauty is the harshness and infertility of the phallic mountains, this white male colonizer mindset is portrayed onto the mountains and then the mountains are reinforcing a patriarchal power pushed upon them.

In the Dine song, in contrast, we are cyclically grounded in the beauty, honesty and presence of nature–both literally and figuratively. “Feet,” “legs,” “voice,” and “strength” are all “of the earth” and each line in the Dine song reverberates after its completion by way of an ellipsis. No thought ends, instead the whole song is a breath which repeatedly reminds the singer and the listener that they are of the earth and intentionally a “lovely” presence. The ellipses and repetition of lines pendulates in the throat and mind and becomes, again, an embodiment of celebration and intention. There is joy, too, throughout. I learn with Perry Parks (unmarked) here, to expand on joy. Joy in the context of celebration is not merely the lighthearted and bright emotion, but “a deep embodied awareness and connection to moments of challenge, pain, grief, or oppression.”[167] The joy in the Dine song is how “lovely it is”: it is lovely that all spirits are interconnected and intrinsic, it is lovely that the earth supports the legs which spring from it. All is lovely, and in singing, or telling, this story becomes a joyful celebration of the loveliness in being.

The reader is positioned completely differently in Muir. We are extracted and placed above, viewing the land like a painting, something to be admired, penetrated, but never to be held in equity. The “complicated clusters of peaks” are

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[167] Perry Parks, "Choosing joy as methodology in journalism research," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 45, no. 2 (2021): 125.

"works of art," not merely natural beauty but something for our eyes' consumption, to be held in the possession of our eyesight and kept. What's more, for Muir, natural "works of art" require the exclusion of Indigenous Peoples, who he claimed had "no right place in the landscape" he sought to conserve.[168] When Muir assumes the narrative stance of omnipotence, naming what's beautiful and not as though he were a God, the reader of his work does too. He thus imbues them with the positionality of a white observer who presumes themselves entitled to the land and thus qualified to conserve it for people like him–all while displacing Native lifeways. In positioning himself as the only being who should be able to pass through the landscape, and hinting at his own superiority over the land, Muir embodies patriarchal, colonial conservation efforts. The celebration of joy and circularity (with the land and one another) in the Dine song wildly contrasts this visual description of what Muir feels compelled to protect and hold in possession.

Sustaining Practices and to Research

Storytelling as a ceremony sustains communities, and in sharing celebration about the essentiality of land and more than human beings, the land and nature become deeply tied with Indigenous storytelling and research, more broadly. These staples of storytelling then allow for all members of the storytelling process (listener, reader, teller, etc.) to engage with aspects of praxis like reflexivity about their positionality. Ranjan Datta reflects on the symbiosis of

[168] John Muir, *The mountains of California* Penguin, 2008: Ch 5.

Indigenous story celebration and research: “I have observed how storytelling became a celebration for me. In my celebration, I enjoy each moment of the research. Research as a celebration provided a great learning space where I as a researcher and participants became we.”[169] Indigenous research methods and storytelling have typically gained traction in academia around the environmental and land-based fields. I posit this is because of the “land-based nature” which often is ascribed to Indigenous culture, ceremony, and celebration. Storytelling is an emerging research method employed as an active, attempted decolonial tool. Often, through stories and retellings we see the land, the ecological, as the sustaining factors of life and prosperity. While this is true, I also see storytelling as a method of sustaining the ecological as Indigenous stories relearn, share, and explore how we are all intertwined and the many ways in which the world deserves our reverence. I will end this thesis by extrapolating what we learn with the research methodology coming from the fields of environmental science engaging Indigenous knowledge and research with/for Indigenous communities specifically to the English program at Colby.

To close this chapter, I would like to offer some words of change and slowness from David Boyd in his book *The Rights of Nature.* Hold them as we move together through time, through this thesis, back to Colby, during your work, out in your life:

> “Think of a geological fault line, where two of the Earth’s tectonic plates overlap. The plates are in constant motion, as they have been since all the continents were united in one large land mass. The plates move slowly, just a few centimeters every year. They would move faster or further but

[169] Datta, 43.

> cannot because other plates are in the way. Pressure builds over decades, centuries, or even millennia. Then the pressure reaches a breaking point, the plates slide, and the earth quakes."[170]

I urge you back to Fanon's words of decoloniality from early in this thesis as "a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come because of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly understanding"[171] as we recenter towards Colby and for taking the words of this thesis out into the world.

[170] David Boyd, *The Rights of Nature: A Legal Revolution That Could Save the World*, ECW Press, 2017: xxxiv.
[171] Fanon, 36.

Closing Thoughts and Thinking Bigger

Throughout this thesis I have explored how Indigenous storytelling is a powerful tool of decoloniality, through exemplified praxis and ceremony. Decoloniality in actuality– not as a practice which functions as an addendum to social justice projects. It "denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede, the colonial enterprise and invasion."[172] In chapter 1, Joy Harjo's words beautifully illustrated how Indigenous storytelling is a decolonial praxis as it honors cyclicality and the agency of more than human beings. Chapter 2 was a dive deeper into the differences between Indigenous storytelling and western storytelling, learning how positionality and reflexivity and gendered language enhance or take away from the power of storytelling to transcend colonial agenda.

What now?

Indigenous Storytelling or storywork can be used as a decolonial research method. It works to decolonize time, re-indigenize research practices and lead to alternate paths of unearthing knowledge through the ceremonial praxis of reciprocity, community creation and points of reflection. Listening and telling stories, specifically in environmental research, draw from hundreds of years of living/working/growing in conjunction with the land in order to imagine possible futures. We can learn about other ways of knowing from the sustaining lifeways of the Mapuche peoples of Chile. The Mapuche peoples have two main ways of

[172] Mignolo and Walsh, 17.

knowing: Kvme Felen (praxis) and Inarrumen (observation).[173] Knowledge comes from observations, and they learn through doing. Stories incorporate their observations and detail their praxis, thus embodying a sort of research, which detail trials, errors, and improvements for better futures. As Robin Wall Kimmerer argues, “traditional knowledge,” like “scientific information ....arises from careful systematic observation of nature, from the results of innumerable lived experiments.”[174] Indigenous storytelling can thus function as a decolonial research praxis that honors Indigenous knowledges and directs us towards equitable futures for all people and more-than-humans like the waters, spirits, plants, rocks around us. Like the Mapuche, where these “systematic observations” then sustain livelihoods and we again build a cyclicality of all beings and a relationality with one another.

Research in the Field of Literature

Indigenous storytelling is decolonial praxis which celebrates and transcends concepts of being and behaving in this world. In line with Tuck and Yang’s understanding, academia often dismisses the importance and weight of true decoloniality by saying, but not practicing, ethics of decolonial praxis. Indigenous storytelling’s intentional decoloniality, specifically in research. I posit

[173] Isidora Segovia, “Food Sovereignty & First Foods” (lecture, Colby College, Waterville, Maine, March 6, 2023).
[174] Robin Wall Kimmerer, “The Web of Reciprocity,” in Gathering moss: A natural and cultural history of mosses, 2021: 101.

that this requires intention, slowness, storytelling, celebration, creativity and more.

Research practices are one way which Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Traditional Ecological knowledge (TEK) are being respected and incorporated into academia to work against "turning decolonial into a metaphor."[175] In fact, "using traditional storytelling as a research method links Indigenous worldviews, shaping the approach of the research; the theoretical and conceptual frameworks; and the epistemology, methodology, and ethics."[176] Each of these facets of using Indigenous storytelling in research lies in stark contrast with the praxese of western storytelling I have discussed in this thesis thus far like linearization of time and an erasure of positionality and collectivism. I call here again to slowness, honoring slowness in stories as well as in the research process and honoring time as an ethical practice. With slowness comes richness, and ethically incorporating Indigenous storytelling into research requires time to make sure it is intentional, reciprocal, and beneficial. David Boyd (settler) says that "evolution—of ideas, law, technology, even life itself—is not a smooth or gradual process. Instead, it happens in fits and starts, in what scientists call punctuated equilibrium."[177] Indigenous storytelling and Indigenous knowledge is slowly being integrated into environmental studies. I believe the praxis of this should be applied to all areas of study, specifically literature.

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[175] Tuck and Yang, 1.
[176] Datta, 35.
[177] Boyd, xxxiv.

Thinking Bigger: Extrapolating to Colby's English Department

I will close this thesis with a close study of my time in the English literature major at Colby and a reflection on the department in general, calling for four main actions to authentically attempt a step towards decolonizing aspects of the department. I understand the suggestions I am positioning take work, time, and commitment. Academia is an imbalanced space where labor is often undercompensated. By incorporating some, or all, of these proposed changes we can work together to prove accountability for the pillars of academia which draw us all in, the potential to rewrite and continue to teach and learn with each other, holding what we can learn from/with the decolonial commitment of Indigenous storytelling.

Suggestion 1: "Literature" as opposed to "English"

At Colby, the major of literature is called "English Major" – and the discipline of English started as a tactic of colonization.[178] I posit that we should change the name of the department from "English" to "Literature" or "Literature and Creative Writing." On the Colby College "English Department" website, it offers that:

> "The English Department offers a range of courses that emphasize the study of literature as an artistic tradition and the study of language more

[178] Paul Jay, "Beyond discipline? Globalization and the future of English." pmla 116, no. 1 (2001): 32-47.

> generally as a crucial component of cultural production and civic engagement."[179]

The department "emphasize[s]" literature, and creative writing is wrapped into that. Further, the website states:

> "Literature is at the heart of being human. Reading and writing provide links between past and present, and across cultures, helping us understand different perspectives and facilitating difficult discussions about the challenges we face.
>
> English students learn to harness and respect the power of language. They investigate the frameworks people have used to make sense of their worlds, and explore personal artistic expression."[180]

Changing the major name from "English" to "Literature" would unlikely affect anything aside from the fact that it would be making an active step towards decolonization, though as I have mentioned before in this project, decolonization is never fully possible within an institution like a college, nor possible in a space which prioritizes mastery. I call back here to Julietta Singh's *Unthinking Mastery*. She offers us that a quality of mastery is "the subordination of what is on one side of a border to the power of what is on the other."[181] If we continue with the name of "English" major, we perpetuate this exponential power indifference which is rooted in the origins of the subject of English. Rooted in the fact that the discipline originated as a way to colonize through language, to subordinate and eradicate other languages so that all people would speak and understand the

[179] Colby College, "Why Study Literature?," English Department, accessed April 12, 2023, https://www.colby.edu/academics/departments-and-programs/english/.
[180] Colby College, "Why Study Literature?."
[181] Singh, 13.

language of the colonizers.[182] An opportunity for change, then: to shift the name of the major to "Literature" from "English."

Suggestion 2: Land Acknowledgement

My second suggestion is adding an active, intentional land acknowledgment to syllabi. Each of us benefits from the tactics of settler colonialism which allow Colby to operate as a private higher education institution. I recognize the criticisms of land acknowledgements, specifically related to the fact that decoloniality is not operating through something like a land acknowledgement, and without actionable change it can seem like an empty gesture. Darren Ranco (Penobscot) says: "If you're not mindful of what you are doing, then, you are turning a land acknowledgement into a token. It becomes an empty gesture to "honor" Native people. It becomes this century's mascot."[183] So add an intentional land acknowledgement infused with your own positionality. This will help to build on the relationality I have touched on throughout this thesis: we can "see you, see ourselves"[184] This process of relationality attempts to bridge a land acknowledgement from being an empty signifier to a more intentional intermediary step.

Further, like Fanon says, "Let us admit it, the settler knows perfectly well that no phraseology can be a substitute for reality."[185] Land acknowledgements

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[182] Jacob Mikanowski, "Behemoth, Bully, Thief: How the English Language Is Taking over the Planet," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, July 27, 2018), https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jul/27/english-language-global-dominance.
[183] Darren Ranco, "Land Acknowledgements in Indigenous Territories," PowerPoint, https://firstlightlearningjourney.net/land-acknowledgements/, 2023.
[184] Harjo, 1990.
[185] Fanon, 45.

must be written in community, with the Indigenous communities living adjacent to the college. The acknowledgements cannot be siloed and completed by a settler with only the "phraseology"[186] of settler colonialism that they possess.

University of Southern Maine and the University of Maine both have college land acknowledgements, something Colby is lacking.

The two are as follows.

The University of Southern Maine acknowledges:

We acknowledge the land and water that the University of Southern Maine campuses occupy, as well as the ancestral and contemporary peoples indigenous to these places in the Dawnland. Campus lands were the ancestral fishing, hunting, and agricultural grounds inhabited by the Abenaki and Wabanaki people for thousands of years.

We recognize that we are on indigenous land. In addition to the Abenaki, the broader place we now call Maine is home to the sovereign people of the Wabanaki Confederacy: the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Mi'kmaq peoples. We exist on their unceded homelands.

We also acknowledge the uncomfortable truths of settler colonialism, among them that the peoples indigenous to this place were often forcibly removed from this place. Harm from the physical and cultural genocide of Native people here and throughout the land we now call Maine continues and is felt by members of the Wabanaki Confederacy who live here today, including our own Wabanaki students, staff, and faculty.

University of Maine's acknowledgement reads:

The University of Maine recognizes that it is located on Marsh Island in the homeland of the Penobscot Nation, where issues of water and territorial rights, and encroachment upon sacred sites, are ongoing. Penobscot homeland is connected to the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations — the Passamaquoddy, Maliseet, and Mi'kmaq — through kinship, alliances and diplomacy. The university also recognizes that the Penobscot Nation and the other Wabanaki Tribal Nations are

[186] Ranco, 2023.

distinct, sovereign, legal and political entities with their own powers of self-governance and self-determination.

While these acknowledgements may not be perfect, the fact that they exist is a step towards an unlearning of the "historical amnesia"[187] we harbor which allows a white settler narrative to erase the genocide and ecocide which occurred in order for us to operate in universities and colleges. What I offer, here, is that when syllabi are recrafted at the beginning of each semester, either a land acknowledgment is added or revised which recognizes the distinct sovereignty and political self-governance and self-determination of the Wabanaki peoples, the agency of waters, land and more-than-human kin, and the reciprocal relationships between these beings. A land acknowledgement cannot rectify the harms of settler colonialism, nor the lifeways lost through settler colonialism and in turn the creation of private institutions, like Colby. What can be done, however, is recognizing our positionality as settler scholars on this land and to work critically and intentionally in this space.

Suggestion 3: Incorporating More Indigenous Authors

My third suggestion is to incorporate more Indigenous authors into curricula. On the Colby English department website, one of the goals of the major is "understanding how representation shapes the world."[188] In my four years here I have seen an increase in diversity of authors represented in classes. I went

[187] Tuck and Yang, 16.
[188] Colby College, "Academic Requirements ," English Department, accessed April 12, 2023, https://www.colby.edu/academics/course-catalogue/academic-program/academic-requirements/.

through the syllabi from my English courses at Colby, and prior to my Junior spring in United States Protest Literature, I had never had an Indigenous author on my syllabi. I want to call back here to my discussion of the collapsing of Indigenous futures which happens when Indigeneity is placed as something in the past and question the settler colonial tendency to recall Indigenous peoples the way they have been depicted throughout colonial history. In museums, writings, books, and movies. Today we see the same image of an Indigenous being from hundreds of years ago. For example, the film "Wind River" made in 2017 where an Indigenous woman is murdered, and two white police officers have to come and solve the case. The lack of Indigenous authors in syllabi is not because the scholarship isn't there, it is because of the operations of settler colonialism which function to place Indigeneity in a confined space, in the past, which functions as separate from academia. This must change.

I have gone through a few example syllabi and found places where Indigenous authorship can be incorporated.

In my senior seminar, EN495, we talked frequently about the interactions of humans and nature and ecocriticism. In conjunction with *Paradise Lost*, I think we should read Robin Kimmerer's piece "The Owner" in *Gathering Moss* in order to conceptualize how humans feel ownership/guidance of nature and the similarities of gendered behavior in Eden. We can then critically unpack how nature "was not just an idea but a territorial and cultural reality that encaged and

policed women, colonized peoples, and extra-human webs of life."[189] This reading, along with much of Kimmerer's work, would aptly fit any class in the new major "Literature and the Environment."

In my 18th Century British Literature class, I suggest we read some of Robbie Richardson's (Mi'kmaw) work which interrogates the discussion of Indigenous people in 18th century British Literature. His book *The Savage and Modern Self: North American Indians in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* would work well in conversation with any of the pieces we read, specifically in the end of the semester with discussions of race when we read *The Woman of Colour*.

In my Creative Writing, EN278 course, I think we should incorporate Morgan Talty's work. He is a Penobscot author who came to Colby in the Fall of 2022 and has written novels as well as short stories. I think his work would fit well in the curriculum and would be excellent material for the beginning of the course, as we begin to learn more about what constitutes a well-written short story.

Each course at Colby, specifically in the English/Literature department has space to include Indigenous authorship. I call on professors to make that incorporation in a responsible and intentional way. On the English department

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[189] Jason W. Moore. Who is Responsible for the Climate Crisis? It's Not the Failure of a Species, it's the Failure of a System. Maize Magazine.

website, it says the major helps with "understanding how representation shapes the world" – Indigenous representation needs to be present, too.

Suggestion 4: Creative Component to Courses

Finally, I posit that there should be a creative assignment component required in each English class at Colby. Therefore, it will be guaranteed to hit every student through their time in a W1 or their L requirement. Creativity requires slowing down and examining material through a new lens. A paper could become a video, a drawing, a song. Here, creativity is helping us to imagine material in a more expansive way. It "challenges colonial ontology and epistemology by expanding the foundation of what we consider knowledge and creativity to be."[190] Something I think creativity could help with, too, is how we spread academic knowledge. I have talked often with my advisors about how the average reading level in the United States is 7th-8th grade.[191] And if that's the case, then why is all the literature about how to change the world published in academic language and a high required reading level? Maybe creative assignments can help with that. We can break the access barrier to the incredible work created in these classrooms through collages, through poetry, through video projects– in creativity.

[190] Anna Griffith, "Embodied creativity in the fine and performing arts," *Journal of Creativity* 31 (2021): 5.
[191] Lisa Marchand, "What is readability and why should content editors care about it," *Center for Plain Language. https://centerforplainlanguage. org/what-is-readability* (2017).

Thank you for your time.

Time is care, time is ethics. I thank you for imagining with me how we can change here at Colby, how we can learn with the incredible work being done by Indigenous scholars and through the powerful properties of Indigenous storytelling. Thank you for imagining possible futures with me. This thesis has allowed me to imagine possible futures at Colby, in literature, and in stories in general. Indigenous storytelling offers new paradigms for how decolonial praxis can be a pillar of moving together in the world. I would like to close this thesis with the closing words from the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address:

> "We have now arrived at the place where we end our words. Of all the things we have named, it was not our intention to leave anything out. If something was forgotten, we leave it to each individual to send such greetings and thanks in their own way. Now our minds are one."[192]

[192] "Thanksgiving Address: Greetings to the Natural World = Ohên:Ton Karihwatêhkwen : Words before All Else," 1993.

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