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Photo-Essay

Reflective Weavings of a Knowledge Basket: Farming and Re-Searching in Wild Rose Country

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Abstract The ways in which we come to be, do, and connect are guided by our knowledge systems, which are reflected in language, stories, governance, and power. In the process of coming to know, Mississauga Nishnaabeg author, Dr. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, encourages writers to start with a story or poem. For Otipemisiw Métis Canada Research Chair, Dr. Jennifer Adese, sharing your own story is an act of reciprocity. Storytelling, as a methodology rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, is also a way to decolonize approaches to research. Using dialogue, photographs, and the metaphor of a willow basket, this autoethnographic essay weaves the spatially and temporally unbounded threads of power in place-thought. Situated as a non-Indigenous anthropologist and small-scale farmer in Wild Rose Country (Treaty 7, Canada), the author guides readers through a sensorial critique of global agrarian regimes. With italicized teachings from her grandmothers and literary mentors, she navigates issues of displacement, privilege, Othering, and collaborative knowledge production. This work is part of the author's broader doctoral dissertation on relational foodways in Western Canada.

Résumé La façon dont nous arrivons à être, à faire et à nous connecter est guidée par nos systèmes de connaissances, qui se reflètent dans le langage, les histoires, la gouvernance et le pouvoir. Dans un processus de création du savoir, l'auteur de Mississauga Nishnaabeg, la Dre Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, encourage les écrivains à commencer par une histoire ou un poème. Pour la titulaire de la chaire de recherche Otipemisiw Métis Canada, Dre Jennifer Adese, partager sa propre histoire est un acte de réciprocité. La narration, en tant que méthodologie ancrée dans les modes de connaissance autochtones, est également un moyen de décoloniser les approches en recherche. Utilisant le dialogue, les photographies, et la métaphore d'un panier de saule, cet essai auto-ethnographique tisse les liens spatialement et temporellement illimités du pouvoir de la pensée-située. En tant qu'anthropologue non autochtone et petite agricultrice de Wild Rose Country (Traité 7, Canada), l'auteure guide les lecteurs à travers une critique sensorielle des régimes agraires mondiaux. Avec les enseignements en italique de ses grands-mères et de ses mentors littéraires, elle navigue sur les questions de déplacement, de privilège, d'altérité et de production collaborative de connaissances. Ce travail fait partie de la thèse de doctorat plus large de l'auteure sur les habitudes alimentaires relationnelles dans l'Ouest canadien.

Keywords storytelling; metaphor; visual anthropology; intergenerational knowledge; relationality; agriculture; colonialism; re-search; reflection

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Under the waning moon of a charcoal sky, my partner, Lachlan, and I trudge through knee-deep snow to the barn loft. "Pass the goat and chicken pens, then turn right after the cob farmhouse. If you've reached the veggie patch, you've gone too far," guides Maryann, tender of Goodnote Community Farm. Lachlan first met Maryann at the annual Frostbite Bushcraft Symposium; I came to know her years later through the Young Agrarians. We find a seat by the woodstove and settle in, steaming cup of mint tea in hand. *There is warmth in a circle*, whisper my grandmothers. Picked the previous summer by the river's edge, I thank the leaves for their calming effect on my queasy growing womb. Generations of wild mint, rose hips, bison, and saskatoons have stewarded Turtle Island for thousands of years alongside their First Nation, Inuit, and Métis kin (Absolon and Willet 2004). *All my relations*.

Red, orange, green, yellow, and brown willow rods harvested two days ago lay at our feet. *Ask permission before taking, Abide by the answer*, guides Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013, 183), member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. Part of a longer 'Honorable Harvest', she goes on: *Take only what you need, Never waste what you have taken, Share.* Still moist from the snow, they bend over, under, over, under. Exchanging stories and laughter, we weave our melon baskets (right photo) with tales of farming on the prairies. "These past two years of drought have been hard on the animals, plants, and soils. Hopefully there will be a good snowpack this March," reflects a farmer. From the trimmings, I craft willow stars to give as Yuletide gifts, so as to not waste what we harvested.

With the rising sun, Lachlan and I make our way from Amiskwaciy-wâskahikan back to Moh'kinstsis, the Blackfoot place-name for the confluence of the Bow and Elbow Rivers. Flowing from the Rocky Mountain glaciers in the West to the prairies in the East, I have learned many names for these waters. To the Ìyethka Nakoda, they are called Wincheesh-pah; Kootsisáw to the Tsuut'ina Denè; and Otos-kwunee to the Nehiyawak or Cree First Nations. Dr. Cutcha Risling Baldy (2014) of the Hoopa Valley Tribe calls on people to *(Re)name places, plants, and processes in their Indigenous given names*. At

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this meeting point, the currents and ecology tell me stories of the past. Plants and animals mirror the nuances of human movement and exchange, invasion, and naturalization. Wild raspberry and Canada violets (left photo) flourish beside dandelions and plantain. Domesticated Honey Bees buzz past Mourning Cloak butterflies in their quest for pollen. Patches of Timothy-grass and Blue Grama thirst upon groundwater from a dynamic ecosystem below inhabited by mycelium, Wood Ants, and European Ground Beetles. *Form an 'ethical space of engagement'* (Ermine 2007) *while Walking parallel paths in a good way* (Indigenous Strategy 2019).

Looking out the car window on the QE2, I visualize summer wheat, barley, and canola fields blanketing the snow-covered landscape. My own ruminations of *Sections, Quarters, Property, Displacement* unfurl with every grain elevator we pass. 1830, the Indian Removal Act south of the Medicine Line where I was born and raised. 1872, the Dominion Lands Act. 1877, the signing of Treaty 7. 1885, The Reserve Pass System. 1889, the Peasant Farming Policy. Century-long Indian Residential Schools. A quote from Ron Goode, Tribal Leader of the North Fork Mono Tribe, and historical ecologist Jared Dahl Aldern comes to mind. The lands and waters themselves are "primary historical sources that narrate settler colonial and Indigenous history and the physical and cultural changes that colonialism has wrought" (2014, 39). Echoed by Mississauga Nishnaabeg author, Dr. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014), *The land must once again become the pedagogy. Learn on and from the Land.*

Feeling the weight of my willow basket on my lap, I think about my Polish, German, Irish, and Italian ancestors who immigrated to North America in the 1800s. *Seven generations ago.* Maria Rosa Altopildi. Did they foster reciprocal relationships with the cornhusk basket-weavers of the Lenape Peoples? Possibly, but highly unlikely. Members of the Delaware Nation were pushed further and further from Lenapehoking, their ancestral and spiritual homelands in the Delaware Valley, eventually leaving their footprints on the Trail of Tears alongside over 60,000 members of the Cherokee, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, Chickasaw, and Choctaw Nations (Jahoda 1975). With the arrival of Europeans to Turtle Island two centuries prior, long-held foodways of the Lenape, Anishinaabe, Mohawk,

Plains Cree, and hundreds of First Nation communities were forcibly disrupted by a Western ideology of agrarian and societal 'development'. To exercise social and political hegemony, the necessities of life—soil, water, seeds, and animals—became increasingly commodified and controlled by those in positions of power; land became "scaled and modified in terms of progress and advancement," (Watts 2013, 26). The basket of colonial ideology, I argue, is woven by asymmetrical power relations intersecting race, sex, and class, among other socio-political identifiers (Crenshaw and Schulz 2016), as well as by a constructed dichotomy between humans and nature (Cronon 1996). Such shifts in global agrarian regimes were, and continue to be, entangled in hegemonic knowledge systems where capital is the central mechanism of dominance, power, exploitation, accumulation, and conflict (Friedmann 2009). Historian Sarah Carter (1990) speaks to these processes of colonial settlement, imposed treaties and reserves, and assimilation tactics that still penetrate communities through intergenerational trauma and socio-economic inequalities. Despite these hardships, approaches to challenging the hegemony have always been regenerating through soils, waters, mountains, and community networks.

After several hours on the road, we arrive home and awaken the fireplace with a chunk of smoky muskeg peat. Cocooned in the sheep hide I processed last fall (right photo, Chelsea fleshing), the mingling scents of lanolin and partially decayed matter kindle ancestral anecdotes. Lachlan, who learned from Iitstsaansski (Sings in the Trees) Winston Wadsworth Jr., instructs: *Flesh, soak, stretch on a wooden rack, sun dry, dry scrape, brain or yoke, and smoke.* Before her passing, my Grandmother Rosalie would tell stories of beam scraping hides, weaving willow baskets to cradle duck eggs and foraged mushrooms, and drying rose hips for tea. She would bring freshly baked bread to her neighbour, who, in return, filled her basket with jars of sauerkraut made from summer cabbages. Together, they would harvest wild raspberries for jam, the leaves gathered with red clover for women's Moon. *Never take the first, Never take the last, Never take more than half* (Kimmerer 2013).

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Feeling the warmth of the flames on our cheeks, we recount the farm's summer bounty. Unraveling into the paths: yellow and green squash, zucchini, and cucumbers. Safely hidden from flea beetles beneath row cover: broccoli, cauliflower, kale, green and purple cabbages. One acre of bright blue haskap berries to freeze and make into pies, tarts, and smoothies deep in the winter months. From our beans, tomatoes, onions, carrots, parsnips, beets, potatoes, and garlic we were nourished and saved seeds (left photo, Chelsea cupping beans). Each year, we build up our seed bank of assorted wheats, barleys, and oats; flowering cosmos, nigella, sunflowers, borage, nasturtiums, calendula, buckwheat, and flax; and medicinal plants tobacco, catnip, valerian, mint, and oregano, to name a few. *If they're heritage, heirloom, open pollinated, you name it… Save some for a rainy day, Share some with others, Sow the rest,* Grandmother Rosalie hums. My hand reaches for the jar of air-drying beans. Fingers swirling in their cool textures and distinct colors, I greet each variety by name like I would a friend. "Hello Amish Nuttle, Appaloosa, Jacob's Cattle, and Jesse Fisk," I whisper, "are you ready for summer Magpie, Molasses Face, Nicaraguan Black Turtle, Swedish Brown, and Tiger's Eye? Oh, Lachlan, please don't forget to pack seeds, some root crops, and a dozen eggs for Penny. We are meeting her at Blackfoot Crossing in Siksika tomorrow!"

Indian activist Vandana Shiva (2016) emphasizes the cruciality of (female) seed keepers and food producers who are collectively working towards the renewal of dignified ethnoecological food systems by resisting corporatized agribusiness. Joining hands at multiscalar levels is of the utmost importance, as the processes of imperial control and commodification, unequal flows of capital and power, divisions of labour and resources, and distributions of climatic impacts continue to have political, socio-economic, and gendered implications within and beyond the contemporary agrarian regime (Bernstein 2016; Borras et al. 2012; Holt Giménez and Shattuck 2011). The crackles of the hearth spark another reminder. "Lach, do you remember at what time bird loading starts next Thursday? 7 PM?" He nods, half asleep from today's drive. Each October and December, Lachlan and I lend a hand catching and throwing toms and hens onto transport trucks for Winter's Turkeys Farm. The fall months also bring yak tagging with Little Loaves Farm

and spent layer culling at Happiness by the Acre. At the beginning of March, we assist Richmond with shearing his sheep, and return a few weeks later to lamb with the ewes. Grandmother Rosalie sings softly in my ear: *Reciprocate.* After shearing, Rosalie taught me to pack a willow basket with wool to gift to magpies for their spring newborns and to mice for a headstart on winter nests. When we harvest beef in September, we use all the organs and render tallow for soap-making. It's also a tasty treat for the ravens!

For us, the cycles of the year guide our work on the land. *Live in accordance with the seasons, Respect the life cycles of those in the natural world* (Adese 2014, 54). Whether we are planting saplings or harvesting poplar buds for balm, putting chickens on pasture or foraging Morchella mushrooms (right photo, Lachlan holding a true morel), each experience is woven into a basket of knowledge that we carry with us. As we move through life with our baskets, it is critical to be aware of what is picked up and placed in our vessels, as well as what seeps in through processes of enculturation. We should continuously evaluate its structural integrity, replacing whips that have deteriorated after generations of colonial, patriarchal, and neoliberal capitalist pressures. It is also important to be mindful of where and how we use our baskets, rather, to question our motivations for and modes of knowledge dissemination. *Set your intentions, reflect on the emotions felt* (Kallio and Houtbeckers 2020). While re-searching (Absolon 2011) what it means to be an anthropologist or a farmer, a Treaty person or a storyteller, how can our baskets be tools to challenge unequal systems of power and representation?

Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021), a Māori, Ngāti Awa, and Ngāti Porou iwi scholar, brings attention to the colonial roots of research, stressing how researchers need to be critically aware of the roles that knowledge production, hierarchies, and institutions play in processes of de/colonization. With this awareness comes responsibility to build meaningful relationships between researchers and communities, and to foster relational accountability all along the way (Absolon and Willet 2005; Smith 2021). As "settler privilege lies as the basis of injustice…overcoming this privilege is a form of co-resistance central to co-existence" (Irlbacher-Fox 2014, 146). Beyond acknowledging

one's privilege and critically examining the truth of colonial history, there need to be reconcili*actions* that actualize social and environmental justice. In both the act and writing of ethnography, such actions must be co-determined through cyclical processes of listening, thinking, doing, acting, and reflecting alongside collaborators (Montenegro de Wit et al. 2021; Sandover 2020). If done reflexively, with attention paid to power imbalances (Gagliano 2021; Li, Hung, and Hodgetts 2021), allyship or participatory research can be an act of resistance against the archetypal positioning of an academic as that of an 'outsider' who provides an 'unbiased, objective' perspective while extracting data for interpretation from 'the field' (Bilgen, Nasir, and Schöneberg 2021).

Both the language and location of an 'etic expert' reinforce ethnographic Othering, which is a temporal, historical, and political act (Fabian 1983). Haitian American academic Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003, 27) emphasizes that "there is no Other, but multiples of others who are all others for different reasons, in spite of totalizing narratives." Further ways of establishing the Other are what cultural anthropologist Johannes Fabian calls the "schizogenic use of time" and the "denial of coevalness" (1983, 21-31), in which time is conceptualized differently in the field than in the armchair. Throughout both, there is a tendency to place 'informants' in a time other than the present. In his analysis on the coloniality of power, Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007) critiques the cultural complex of European modernity/rationality wherein the 'Other' is either absent from discourse or if present, is objectified. Central to the transformation of academia and food systems is the rejection of individualism, dualism, and knowledge-guarding which are embedded in colonial ideology reflected in Western theories-practices. Both research and foodways require reciprocal relationships, collaborative productions of knowledge, and humble reflexivity (Hermes, Bang, and Marin 2012).

As a scholar of European descent who tends plants and animals for food and medicine on Treaty 7 lands (left photo, Chelsea harvesting carrots), I acknowledge how I am in a process of decolonizing my ways of knowing, being, doing, and connecting. *Reflect, Unlearn, Relearn*. Throughout this life-long process, Zoe Matties (2016) and Abra Brynne (2015) encourage feelings of uncomfort; to harness

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those emotions to highlight the complicity in colonialism and build relationships based on learning about and working across our differences. In my broader research on relational foodways, from which this reflection essay was born, every step of the doctoral design (e.g., identifying the problems, objectives, methodologies, and hopeful outcomes), implementation, and analysis was carried out with the guidance of two community elders, Sara Rodriguez Huenchullan and Oscar Jara, who I met while loading turkeys. Over café and Chilean empanadas, they instilled the need to *be a radical scholar rooted in critical analysis; Always make it political, because it is*.

Since most universities still mandate a single-authored dissertation, I intentionally included dialogic exchanges, photographs, and storytelling that reflect *Interconnectedness, Relationality, and Sacredness* (Caxaj 2015); parts of co-authored journal articles were woven into research chapters. Employing a narrative continuum (Lake and Zitcer 2012) in my dissertation helped to navigate issues of voice, authority, and power relations by highlighting the first-hand accounts and lived experiences of those who have been systematically marginalized from Food Studies practice-discourse, including Indigenous, Black, immigrant, and female growers. In addition to theoretical contributions to sociocultural anthropology, Critical Agrarian Studies, and decolonial studies, the experiential aspects of this collaborative work strengthened capacity in regenerative farming and seed-saving, fostered intercultural understanding and ecological connections, and facilitated intergenerational knowledge-sharing.

As my 'ethnographic field' is the field(s) in which I grow crops, medicinal plants, and animals, the seeds of these relationships, projects, and reflections will continue to grow and reroot. Rather, there is no end to fieldwork that is holistically part of a researcher's life; it is impossible to compartmentalize relationships and experiences made in research from the ones that shape us into who we are (Wilson 2008). From this foundation, the late Standing Rock Sioux activist, Vine Deloria Jr. (1969; Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997), argues for the *Dismantling of the 'exotic Other', the rejection of knowledge for knowledge's sake, and the humanization of the anthropologist.* As my thought trail winds its way back to the fire's warmth, I am reminded of a final teaching from Opaskwayak Cree knowledge seeker, Dr. Shawn Wilson. "If research hasn't changed you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (2008, 135). Over the past four years of graduate school, I have grown into the anthropologist, community member, wife, and mother I am today. One whose knowledge basket contains nourishing morsels of theories-practices on regenerative agriculture and ethnoecological communities, and who has a lifetime of learning still to come. No doubt I will stumble and be humbled, but I will make every intention to do so gracefully. *Dedicated to the Wild Roses, past, present, and future.*

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