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Introduction, Positionality, Methodology

Western colonial institutions and government have relied solely on an honour system of self-identification in regards to who claims Indigenous identity. This has led to incredibly problematic cases of high ranking officials and academics being revealed as Indigenous Identity Fraudsters. While this phenomena is not the subject of this paper, it is in part my inspiration for compiling this research. Largely, these individuals are celebrated by white members of academia and the public as “inspirational success stories” which play into stereotypes and harmful misconceptions of Indigenous identity. Outside of Indigenous circles, academic, familial, and communal, a lack of knowledge or understanding into what it means to be Indigenous further perpetuates the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands, polities, languages, and knowledge systems. By analyzing the works of Indigenous authors, concepts and constituent factors of Indigenous identity can be recognized.

I am Jacob Boisclair. I am a queer Metis undergraduate student living on the unceded ancestral territory of the Tk’emlups te Secwepemc within Secwepemculecw. My family originally came to Canada in the early 1600’s and in the mid 1800’s settled south-west of the Qu’appelle Valley in Saskatchewan. My lineage has been disrupted, which is partly why I am interested in Indigenous Ontology and Phenomenology, and largely the inspiration for writing this essay. I make no claims to objectivity, or to ownership of any of the ideas presented in this essay.

Western colonial academia and Indigenous knowledge systems seem to be diametrically opposed in regards to the status by which scholars present their work. Traditional academia demands objectivity and opposition, the challenging of ideas. This system is necessarily combative and hierarchical. Part of this is the removal of oneself from their work; because if one writes about themselves the work in its entirety is no longer objective or true. Indigenous scholarly work must include oneself. As Leanne Simpson states “My body and my life are part of my research... I write from the first person, because within Nishnaabewin, this is a method of accountability for my own thoughts, critique, and analysis, and a recognition that these will necessarily vary from other Nishnaabeg thinkers” (Simpson 2017, 32). Western academic writing often focuses on amplifying and performing from an “objective” standpoint in one’s research. Here, one speaks under the presumption that their claims are correct, and without the inclusion of the self that wrote it. The practice of writing subjectively, of inserting oneself into their work provides accountability and ownership over one’s mistakes, misunderstandings, and the misrepresentations that come from those. It is not bad to make mistakes. Simpson states that “mistakes produce knowledge,” that the Nishnaabeg origin story is about how “Gzhwe Manidoo created the world by struggling, failing and by trying again” (Simpson 2017, 20). Within this work, I will take ownership of any mistakes or misunderstandings I present from my interpretations of each author’s work, and my language will reflect this.

I am inspired to reject the western traditional academic norms of scholarly writing in order to pursue accountability and openness, and to discourage hierarchical notions of objectivity and expertise. Simpson further states that she “cannot see how Indigenous peoples can continue to exist as *Indigenous* if we are willing to replicate the logics of colonialism, because to do so is

to actively engage in self-dispossession from the relationships that make us Indigenous in the first place” (Simpson 2017, 35). This paper, my paper, will break from traditional western colonial academic norms in order to approach the writings of each author and the subject matter with respect to their individual and distinct origins. While there may be similar understandings of these constituent factors or concepts across authorships and their respective nations, it is of utmost importance to properly delineate the sources of the intelligence structures and cultural understandings so as to avoid the misunderstanding or perpetuation of ideas that would contribute to pan-indigenization. In order to achieve this, the works analyzed in this essay will be separated by authorship- by their individual Nationhood.

Furthermore, an important aspect of conducting research that is particularly highlighted in Indigenous epistemologies is positionality and self reflection. Leanne Simpson introduces the Anishinaabeg concept of *Biskaabiiyang* as a methodology for Anishinaabeg scholars to reflect on their positionality. Quoting Wendy Makoons Geniusz, an Anishinaabe scholar from Wisconsin: “Biskaabiiyang research is a process through which Anishinaabe researchers evaluate how they personally have been affected by colonization, rid themselves of the emotional and psychological baggage they carry through this process, and then return to their ancestral traditions” (Simpson 2021, 50). In reference to a research or scholarly position, Simpson states that “In this context it means ‘returning to ourselves,’ a process by which Anishinabek researchers and scholars can evaluate how they have been impacted by colonialism in all realms of being” (Simpson 2021, 49). While I am not Anishinaabeg, the importance of recognizing western, colonial perspectives ingrained in my thinking due to the historic and ongoing process of colonization is imperative when engaging with this subject matter. As such, throughout this work I will do my utmost to reflect on my positionality in a holistic sense, including the mental, emotional, physical, and

spiritual parts of being in order to do this work in a good way. Any misunderstandings or improperly interpreted language, terms, or customs from other cultures within this paper are wholly mine.

Related to the process of *Biskaabiyang*, Simpson reflects on her positionality in reference to other Indigenous author's works. She asks questions such as

Where does this theory come from? What is the context? How was it generated? Who generated it? What was their relationship to community and the dominant power structures? What is my relationship to the theorist or their community or the context the theory was generated within? How is it useful within the context of my own people? Do we have a similar concept or theory? Can I use it in an ethical and appropriate way (my ethics and theirs) given the colonial context within which scholarship and publishing take place? What are the implications of citation, and do I have consent to take this intellectual thought and labour from a community I am not a part of? Does this engagement replicate anti-Blackness? Colonialism? Heteropatriarchy? Transphobia? (Simpson 2017, 63)

While *Biskaabiyang* particularly relates to one's reflection of the impacts of colonialism on what seems to be their internal systems: being, thoughts, knowledge structures, etc, the mode of reflection presented by Simpson here is entirely about external positionality. Engaging in the methodology of reflecting on relationships one has with others: other people and communities, and their respective traditions, customs, cultures, and intelligence systems which inform and shape their work is pertinent to engaging with the works of Indigenous authors. This state of reflection is active and changing; it is not something that is completed and finished. It is my hope that the conduct of my internal and external reflections are seen throughout this paper.

Works Cited

Simpson, Leanne. *As We Have Always Done*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Simpson, Leanne. *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*. Winnipeg, Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2021.