Indigenous Being

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The Canadians for a long time have attempted to destroy the collective memory of Indigenous people. We have been the "Other" and hold an oppositional value in their mythology of progress and cultural achievement. Gerald Vizenor, speaking of the United States, calls this "Manifest Manners," which can easily be applied to Canada. President Munroe spoke of the "Manifest Destiny" that the United States had in dominating all of America. God, and divine will, allegedly legitimized this "Manifest Destiny." Vizenor characterizes the ideology of this process as one of "dominance" (Vizenor, 1994, p. 6). He adds to the characterization as being a "grievous outcome of avarice" and "perverse determinism" (Vizenor 1994, p. 2). The metaphysics of Indian-White relations has been, in practice and discourse, our subordination

With the end of the Fur Trade, and the transfer of land from the Hudson Bay Company to the Dominion of Canada, we became a hindrance to the settlement of this country. V LABFB' ("the North West Rebellion") was the manifestation of the inner logic of Treaty violation, and was used as a way of destroying collective Indigenous identity and self-determination. Our oppression is part of the same historical logic of the appropriation of our lands. It is certainly ironic that the Treaties were signed in the name of the earth, and it is this very earth that European culture has destroyed. Both are parts of the same dialectic of subordination – a dialectic of "Otherness."

During the Treaty process, there was no renunciation of our sovereignty. Yet, the Canadians subverted the Treaties, and invented the fiction of the *Indian Act* to regulate our lives. Perhaps, one of the most insidious parts of it was the ban on our religious ceremonies:

Every Indian or other person who engages in, or assists in celebrating or encourages either directly or indirectly another to celebrate, any Indian festival, dance or other ceremony of which the giving away or paying or giving back of money, goods or articles of any sort... or the utilization of the dead or living body of any human being or animal ... is guilty of an indictable offense (Indian Act 1895, section 114).

The process of subordinating my people was essential to our social

disintegration. It is interesting that the Canadians who were largely Christians, were so against our sharing. Our sharing occurred as a function of social ceremonies, which linked our communities together, and which in turn protected the mechanisms through which Indigenous culture was transmitted. By destroying the ceremonies, a people are destroyed.

(Payepot) had not participated in the events of 1885. Yet, like Chief Thunderchild, he encountered a great deal of opposition in his attempt to continue the Sundance. In a discussion with Assistant Indian Commissioner A.E. Forget, <-<- demonstrated the irony of the government's position. When questioned by Forget about why he continued the Sundance, answered: "I will agree not to pray to my God in my way, if you will promise not to pray to your God . . . in your way" (Pettipas 1994, p. 247). engaged the Assistant Indian Commissioner with trickster hermeneutics. For Vizenor, "[t]rickster stories are the translation of liberation" (Vizenor 1994, p. 15). Payepot, through his words and actions, was attempting to change the circumstances around him. Vizenor characterizes trickster hermeneutics as "the interpretation of simulations in the literature of survivance ... transmutation ... and themes of transformation in oral tribal stories and written narratives" (ibid.). Vizenor articulates the concept of "post-Indian," which is the process of moving beyond the impositions of the mainstream society.

The problem for too long has been that the Canadians have attempted to control us in every way. Unfortunately, the process of colonialism is also alive and well at the University. There is an ongoing effort to subordinate our world view. This goes on despite the fact that the universities are right on our land. The institution itself often is a manifestation of the process of our colonization. To maintain a genuine Indigenous identity in the university is very difficult given the various pressures.

There is the tacit assumption that we are inferior and that our collective Being in the world is inferior to the European model. We must constantly struggle to prove ourselves. There is a tacit assumption, which is quite widespread at the present time in Canada, that if one is a minority scholar and one is doing well, then this is due to affirmative action. No matter how good we are, we are often in the position of having to justify ourselves, our people and our work. There seems to be a profound distrust of presence that lingers in the university structure.

In the 1970s, the University of Saskatchewan opposed the integration of the Cultural College with their institutional structures. I have heard this account from my father, who was one of the first Indian teachers at the University of Saskatchewan. As a result, the College was reorganized and

became the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College in Regina and the rest remained in Saskatoon as the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College, I think that it is sad that our knowledge was rejected by the University of Saskatchewan. Also, فالطة (my grandmother) Ida McLeod struggled to get Cree taught at the University of Saskatchewan. At one point, someone told her, "Well, you have the Bible in Cree, what else do you want?" It is a travesty that while the odd section of Cree is taught at the University of Saskatchewan, there is no tenured chair in Cree (let alone Saulteaux, Dene. Nakota and Dakota). Large resources and faculty are made available to foreign languages such as English, French, and Ukrainian, vet Indigenous languages receive only token support.

Some years ago, I was approached to help with a course in Indigenous philosophy. In retrospect, I can see that the whole experience and process was a subtle form of colonialism. My views and culture were not important to the person who solicited my help. Rather, I was useful as a political entity. which would soften up criticism because I was Cree. My involvement, at least on the level of tokenism, would legitimize the project.

We went around and "consulted" people. The process of consultation was very superficial. It seemed more like a process of rubber stamping than an actual process to enlarge the scope of the project. In fact, at one point, I was told that I was holding back the process because I was insisting on too many changes. If he truly respected me, and if he truly respected my culture, why were my opinions considered to be a hindrance? This process was a facade and amounted nothing more than the polite appropriation of my culture. The episode points to the problems which can emerge when Indian people do not have control of the institutions which "image" and "picture" them.

After some time, I became conscious of my true role in the project. While, on the surface, it appeared that I was an equal, my position was one of subordinate. The "priest of discourse" was the one who had the power and my suggestions were ignored. I realized that I was being used. Maybe the experience has made me somewhat cynical, but it has sharpened my consciousness as an Indigenous person. It has made me keenly aware of the politics of representation and the power struggles that accompany the struggle for authenticity. The person even at one point said: "Your people won't do this unless I do. ... Who will do it if I don't?" It was obvious to me at this point that the person had missed the whole point. The process of bringing Indigenous philosophy into the University did not legitimize it. Rather, Indigenous thinking and Being had existed for thousands of years. It was the Old Ones who were essential, not the self-appointed "expert." The

"expert" was not like the missionaries of old, but was in fact even more insidious. He wanted to teach me about my own culture. At least, the missionaries of old respected the fact that Indigenous culture was best known and disseminated by Indigenous people.

I remember when I was discussing my concerns, the "expert" told me that I was being unreasonable. He had just as much right, according to him, to examine Indigenous philosophy. Yet, in his discourse, he claimed not only to have a perspective, but rather the normative perspective. Also, by ignoring my concerns to a large extent, and by cutting short the consultation process, he made himself, or least attempted to make himself, the priest of discourse.

Any process of colonialism involves to some extent the relational concept of "Otherness." The Indigenous culture for instance, is made Other, and represents the bipolar cluster of concepts of the mainstream society. While the mainstream culture is the embodiment of Truth, History, Normativity, the Indigenous culture is taken to represent Untruth, Rumour/Folk History, and Insufficient Contingency. The process of colonialism is a vampire. The life of the Indigenous culture, including our land, are used to satisfy and support the discourse/ material reality of the mainstream culture.

Yet, there is a more insidious process that occurs simultaneously with the process I just described. Sometimes, the inherent "Otherness" as a relational concept between indigenous cultures and the mainstream cultures is masked and concealed under the guise of universalism. Cornell West articulates this at great length from an African-American perspective in Keeping Faith (West 1993). The "Otherness" of the indigenous culture is subverted and this is justified because it is taken to be inferior. The destruction of our life-world is taken to be morally sound because we are given a "superior culture."

Under the guise of "universalism," the outsider comes in, claiming to share a humanity with Indigenous people. While the notion of shared humanity is useful at some levels, it can always be used as a way of subverting the Indigenous life-world. The person from the mainstream appears to be legitimated through this universalism and also through "paper credentials."

There is much talk today about two key concepts: (1) education and (2) self-government. Both are seen as solutions to the problems of Indigenous people of this country and also to some extent the liberation of the Indigenous mind. Both of these concepts, education and self-government, are essential in discerning the task of Indigenous thinking and Being. Yet,

"education" can be nothing more than a vehicle for assimilation. Clearly, this was the case in residential schools. Also, it occurs in the modern age when the work of Indigenous scholars is subsumed under the rubric of other disciplines and the corresponding paradigms. This is not Indigenous thinking and Being, or healthy Indigenous discourse, but is rather part of the dialectic of our subversion. Ideally, Indian/ Native Studies can rectify this, by importing Indigenous paradigms into the academy.

Education, is I think, the process through which collective ideals and goals are transmitted to the next generation. Lorna Williams, an Indigenous educator from British Columbia, presented an interesting diagram during a recent talk. On the top of the diagram was a funnel that collapsed into a long, narrow passage that turned into an opening funnel (Williams, 1997). Lorna Williams encourages everyone to interpret the diagram for themselves. The first part of the diagram, the first funnel, represents the manner in which we come into the world. We come as gifts from God, open to the possibilities of Being. The second part, the large tunnel, is the process of cultural transmission. The end part is the manner in which we release back into the universe what we are taught. At least this is my interpretation. I have always been taught that human beings are gifts from the Creator, and that the proper upbringing ("socialization," "education") of them ensures the continuation and transmission of culture.

The point is that if we want to have true Indigenous Being, we have to make sure that the "funnel" – the site, the place, through which our collective views are transmitted – is preserved. If our modes of knowledge of transmission are destroyed, we have lost our Indigenous being forever. If not, then the process is nothing more than assimilation. For instance, what is "Cree" about reserves who follow mainstream educational procedures in our schools? My father Jerry McLeod has asked this sort of question on many occasions. How is this process Indigenous? It does nothing but contribute to the destruction of our life-world.

We must ask fundamental questions about the meaning of Indigenous Being. I think that part of it is the celebration of our survival. George Manuel wrote:

The Fourth World has always been here in North America. Since the beginning of European domination its branches, one by one, have been denied the light of day. Its fruit has been withered and stunted. Yet the tree did not die. Our victory begins with the knowledge that we have survived. [Manuel and Posluns, 1988, p. 285]

What is more, being Indigenous means being tribal and it means having a

specific, local identity. The "long passage," to use Lorna William's terminology has remained intact. We must celebrate this survival.

Also, being Indigenous means being responsible to two communities. For example, we face the challenge of reconciling the concerns of our academic community with our cultural community. Sometimes these interests and concerns overlap, but clearly there are times when there is a clear tension between these two communities and requirements demanded by each. Indigenous Studies departments must not base measures of qualifications merely on paper qualifications, but also on proficiencies within Indigenous paradigms. This undoubtedly will be a long struggle and will require Indigenous control and presence in departments. It does necessarily follow that because we choose to find a place for ourselves in academia, that we have to blindly accept the paradigms of mainstream academia. We have to engage academia with the spirit of "trickster hermeneutics" (Vizenor's term) and reshape it so we can be ourselves and represent ourselves authentically. Vizenor writes: "The postindian warriors are new indications of a narrative recreation, the simulations that overcome the manifest manners of domination" (Vizenor, 1994, p. 6).

Being Indigenous means to be from a specific place and time. It is a celebration of having a specific historicity. It is a celebration of remembering ancient songs and ceremonies. We must celebrate our "survivance" (Vizenor's term, ibid., p. 4). It must be a rejection of pan-Indianism, and a celebration of our specific, tribal identities. Being Indigenous is also a rejection of the banality of modernity. It is a rejection of the homogenizing forces of modern, corporate culture. Being Indigenous means we should hold our ground even if this is difficult. We must continue our struggle to be indigenous for our own well-being and the well-being of our descendants.

bbr (Peter Vandall, my great-grandfather) spoke of the destruction of Cree education (the "funnel" in Lorna Williams' diagram):

It is that, for instance, the young Crees of today do not seem to want education, all of the Crees really seem to want their children to have White Man's knowledge (Vandall, 1987, pp. 36–37).

It is as though the white education is taken to be superior. But, this "education" has done much, for example, in residential schools to disrupt our cultures. In the spirit of Old Man Kiyam, many have given up.

Edward Ahenakew constructs the character of Old Man Kiyam in

Voices of the Plains Cree (Ahenakew, 1995). Old Man Kiyam has given up. He says to some of the younger people of his band: "O my children, never let things slide; keep a steady hold, each one of you upon yourself; do not throw away your life simply to spite another; take warning from the failure that I am" (Ahenakew, 1995, p. 78). After being placed on reserves, all of the Aboriginal people experienced a great deal of trauma. The traditional modes of learning were downgraded.

bbth elaborates on the effect that the subordination of Indigenous people has had on young people:

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It is as though their Creeness means nothing to them (Vandall, 1994, p. 37).

It is as though the destruction of the Cree life-world means nothing to them which bespeaks of a climate of apathy. Rather, our tribal identity as Cree people is the foundation of our existence.

The Old People who lectured in the past, and the older teachers today, talk about rough. (drinking). rough. is killing us as a people. It is the way so many of my people deal with the process of detribalization. In order to combat the pain, some people choose to drink. To fight the dark side of our encounter with European culture, we have to affirm our pride in our tribal identities. The Old People used to talk about our Creeness as a gift from God. We should see our tribal identity as our strength.

Part of our tribal identities means the preservation of language. This is absolutely essential for the preservation of Indigenous Being. Language is the "funnel" (to draw upon Lorna Williams' terminology) through which our culture will survive. In ceremonies, prayers are made in Cree – it is the source of our Creeness. But, we must not be too hard on ourselves. We must do our best to speak our languages. Mel Joseph spoke at a recent Round Dance. I paraphrase him to the best of my memory: He said that language is important. It is the source of our identity. We should speak our language to the best of our ability. Even if it means that we only learn one word a day (Joseph, 1997).

He also spoke about education. He spoke of how the people of his age never were able to get a formal education. He only had a grade three. In this way, he was envious of the young students at the Round Dance who were getting a formal education. He never had that chance. Yet, at the same time, he pitied them. Because many of them had lost their language and their tribal identity. He urged the crowd to realize the importance of their tribal identity. Our tribal identity is our source of strength (Joseph 1997). Thus, true

"education" involves two things: (1) Indigenous paradigms/ languages, and (2) modern, formal education. Somehow the two must be reconciled. The task of the Indigenous academic must do both of these things as well in meaningful and substantive ways.

Part of Indigenous Being must involve sharing and a sense of community. In many ways, this is at odds with the mainstream society which stresses individualism and a culture of narcissism.

In the old days, our Worthy Men Societies (>P"f"C<->) embodied the value of sharing. I know of at least one Worthy Men Society with an unbroken link to the time before the white man. The society has the function of taking care of those who are unable to take care of themselves. There is an element of humility in this process as the >P"f"C-> did not consider themselves better than their fellow Cree. The central principle of the society is to share. I have been told that in the old days, the >P"f"C-> would go out and hunt. When the food was presented to the community, the would eat last. They would provide for the others in the spirit of community. That was the function of the elite in Plains Cree society. A young Indigenous male academic must do the same. We share our abilities with our people selflessly. Our work must stay in touch with our communities and also have the moral task of our collective liberation.

Mandelbaum outlined the function and meaning of ▶P"\\Cd^\ at conference on the Plains Cree:

Now these were the brave men... then he would be taken in to the lodge and formally inducted and he would have to give away what he had. This was the usual ceremonial accompaniment of getting any honour.... It was basic to the warriors who were the elite of

... [the] Plains Cree society. They were the men who were selfless, who put the good of the tribe above their own good or even above their relatives. [Mandelbaum, 1975, p. 10]

If I'm going to give you a present, **b P >"rCA-r)**, I honour you with this present. . . For the **>P"r"CA-r** when they had their ceremonies, they were giving away horses. And it's also associated with affluence. There were the affluent men of the society, that is

why they could afford to give away horses and goods, because they were **>P"C"** [Cuthand, 1975, p. 25]

Smith Atimoyoo of Little Pine added that to be considered to be PPTCO" you had to do things for people, not for yourself. . . . We don't have the same things happening that happened in the old days, but there are many arrows coming our way and we have to be brave" (Atimoyoo, 1975, p. 23). As Indigenous people, we have to struggle against the domination by the mainstream society. Instead of being warriors dwelling in external space, we have to fight within the landscape of our souls. And in turn, bring this struggle of interiority out into our external community. As Indigenous beings today, we must share our gifts and our ideas with our people. Part of our revitalization of our Indigenous Being will be to creatively rethink the limitations of our "traditions." There are some things which are in need of change. For instance, the concept of PPTC<. must apply to both genders. I will say more about this in a bit.

σιρίς, my grandfather, a survivor of the attempted genocide of the residential schools, dreamt of a College where the finest Indian thinking would occur. He was instrumental in getting the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College going in the first place. He dedicated his life to attempting to discern the true meaning of Indigenous Being. One of the aims of the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College was "[t]o act as an instrument whereby Indians can become aware of their history and culture" (Saskatchewan Indian 1, no. 1 (1970), p. 1). Another goal of the Cultural College was "[t]o collect, produce, and circulate all types of audio-visual materials dealing with Indian and Indian problems" (Saskatchewan Indian 1, no. 1 (1970), p. 1). σιρίς was part of this process.

The Old People spoke of the value of trying to maintain Indigenous Being. Sandy Lonethunder said:

Some people say that it's too late but let's hope not because if we let go of our Indian culture and forget about it, then we will be truly lost. [Lonethunder, 1974, p. 3]

This is what ber was talking about. The destruction of the tribal identity and

effects of this detribalization amounts to shame and being lost. Now, they are turning to gangs to recreate their tribal identities in the city. So many of our young people seem lost in the city. They seem to be without hope.

Certainly, it is through young people that our culture will be transmitted. They are the ones we need to reach if are to survive as a people. If we really are going to survive as a people, we have to raise our families properly. This especially applies to Indigenous men. We have to renounce violence and do our part in raising our families. For too long, our women have borne the brunt of our oppression as a people. For too long, as Indigenous men, we have taken our anger out on those most vulnerable.

Indigenous Being also means seeing the wonder of creation. Indigenous Being means thanking the creator for the gift of life. My great-grandfather said:

And in the morning, when they arose, I used to hear the elders; just as he singing of the birds sounds beautiful in the morning, at day-break, so it was with the elders who could be heard all over as they sang – they would even sing in response to their wives- they took such pride in themselves, and their journey through life was beautiful. [Vandall, 1987, p. 49]

Eli Bear of Little Pine echoes this:

And I used to wonder when at the break of day he used to stand outside and chant, and singing of the sun. He used to do this using the four different directions and put words in the song. While he was doing this, I used to wonder why he did this for . . . but now I see what he was getting at. [Bear, 1974, p. 9]

Through prayer and songs, those Old Ones were keeping alive the "funnel" which Lorna Williams spoke of. These songs and words were manifestations of our Indigenous Being.

Eli Bear spoke of the importance of cultural transmission:

Now today here, these elders want their young to try and understand about our culture and they are living too dangerously. And I always tell these people who ask me what I'm working at. I always want to explain what we are doing. A lot of people say it's too late, but if

we don't do anything it will be too late. . . . [Bear, 1974, p. 9]

We still have so much of our culture left that we have to do our best to preserve our Creeness. It is never too late, and there is value in every effort that we make, even if we think that it is insignificant. I remember one person said, "As long as there is still one living member of a tribe, the culture is still there."

Eli Bear, who was a field worker for the Saskatchewan Indian Cultural College in the 1970s, worked extensively with the Old Ones. He reflected on this process and also the thoughts that the Old One had of the project:

I've heard many of these elders say to me that, what we are trying to do is very good work, work hard at it they tell me.... So I usually tell these young people that we have to stand beside these elders. [Bear, 1974, p. 9]

In the 1970s, there was a great sense of community and purpose. We really have to return to this, if we want to survive as Indigenous people. We have to move beyond the paradigm of individualism that permeates the culture of the mainstream. Jim Kâ-Nîpitêtêw, from the Onion Lake reserve, added: "I know we are doing something good that will help us all and our future generations. We see our work is doing something good" (Kâ-Nîpitêtêw, 1973, p. 12).

Despite the residential schools, Indian Agents, and other tragedies, these people preserved our collective Indigenous Being. They continued to speak Cree (and other tribal languages). These people gave us a chance to be Indigenous:

β σ"Δ>∇·Δ·ἐ>
γ σω- βργο,
β β σ Δ·C δο,
β β σ Δ·C δο,
β β σ Δ·Δ σο,
β β σ Δ·Δ σο,

I thank all the Crees who preserved our Creeness so that today I can be Cree

The Old Ones used to have an interesting way of teaching a long time ago. They would lecture by putting a knife in the ground. It was at this point

that they would say, "If you do not like what I am saying, you can use this knife against me." The Young Ones were always given a choice and there was no autocratic form of learning and teaching. There was always an element of choice. People of my age were given the choice to maintain our Indigenous identity. We have a choice to still learn our languages and our tribal religions. We owe to our children and to our grandchildren, to those beyond this, to offer them the same choice.

Sources

I have deliberately called this "sources" because I think that the standard form of bibliography is grossly inadequate for this purposes of this paper. My understanding of Indigenous issues has been profoundly shaped by my father, Jerry McLeod, the man who raised me. I have also been profoundly influenced by my grandparents John R. McLeod and Ida McLeod. My sense of historicity has also been profoundly influenced by my great-grandfather Peter Vandall, bbf. As their grandson and son, my words are echoes of theirs. That is what often forgotten in the field of Indigenous Studies. We do not own the stories we tell. The stories that we tell are reflections of a collective memory.

Here is a list of the people and sources that I have cited in the conventional manner throughout the course of this paper. In the course of the paper, I have listed the speaker as the source of the information rather than cited the person who happened to compile the stories (e.g. the editor). This conventional process tends to distort the origin of the information in the first place. I encourage any who cites this paper to do the same.

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