

A Savage Silent Calling for the Right to Be: Life as an Indigenous Woman – Sakawikaskeyihtamowin

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Introduction

I begin by talking about words, the pieces of dynamic cognitive immateriality that gives rise to human speech and writing. Words inevitably find meaning and human expression through dialogue, narrative, imagination, and communion. They arise through a person's being and knowing, and are given shape and direction through feeling and sensing within the constant cognitive forward propulsion of living cultures and relationships.

Words then require consciousness. Although consciousness is not discussed explicitly in this work, it is understood as a People's internal cognitive, spiritual, and experiential mapping of their place on earth. Indigenous consciousness begins with the land from which life springs and is sustained. In putting my thinking and words forward, I ask to be heard as an Indigenous woman rooted within the land of Turtle Island as North America because my words have sprung from this land, carried on the breath of my ancestors.

I share thoughts and experiences which are grounded and interpreted from a consciousness formed in relationship with the lands, waters, and other living beings in the boreal forests of northern Alberta. Discourse is guided by experiences and enveloping thoughts related to the ways that my ancestral language and culture, comprising the expression of my life as an Indigenous woman, has evolved with strength in the face of constant purposeful repression and opposition from colonial forces.

The topics I will speak about include the ways we understand, and the ways we support, particular activations of archetypes in relation to cultural and racially-defined contexts and relationships; the targeted killing or destruction of Indigenous women as a thinly-veiled settler-supported colonial act that has continued since 'first contact'. While this work does not speak directly to the teaching and significance of personal reference points within Indigenous reality, these points are embedded in all narratives and commentary; conclusions and syntheses will assist in readers' parallel processing of the content as one whole, to be observed from different and distinct reference points that will disclose different information and give rise to new knowledge. Indigenous calling out to be heard is in response to effective silencing; the intention is that others will hear and sense our presence. As an old Indigenous mother, in this work, I urge educators and other readers to constantly look forward, always acknowledging themselves as the careful bearers of the past.

Pehta way pitahkosowak A Howling in the Wilderness: The Power of the Word

To experience the "power" of a word, an individual is encompassed and moved beyond the limitations of the concrete or denotative aspects of a "word". As symbols, words hold the capacity and primary function of pointing, directing, or signifying. However, to experience the power of words, individuals participate in the vital transformation processes that move words beyond symbols and into significantly-contexted meanings. These contexted meanings hold the "power" of words that have moved beyond symbols, and express that power of words through meaning within languages, knowledge paradigms, and forms of consciousness. When we as participants of discourse - speakers and hearers - are not immersed in a shared language or knowledge paradigm, the power of words within the discourse is lost to us. The power still is, but without the shared condition of discourse, the potential value, meaning, and purpose of such power is non-existent for us.

Although the indivisible connection between language and thinking is readily accepted, disparate cultural and linguistic groups and peoples around the globe are turning increasingly towards their own knowledge

systems for deeper understanding about cognition and cognitive development, language and language learning, and the related impacts of these on the physical and mental wellbeing of their peoples. This movement of people towards their own knowledge systems for understanding the deep roots of historical and contemporary issues is one that has traditionally and historically been supported by Indigenous peoples. In consideration of this, I am acutely aware that, in many Canadian institutions, organizations, and social environments, Indigenous people are actively present participants interacting in processes of formal engagement with policy development, administration, and planning in education, health, and other social and professional services. Going further along this thread, I know from direct experience that support for relying upon ancient Indigenous knowledge systems as an effective approach for dealing with contemporary issues in Indigenous communities is rarely, if ever, apparent from a perspective of? Indigenous peoples as distinct political and social collectives, e.g. First Nations self-governments. Connected to northern Alberta Cree and Metis people, one reason for this? that I have understood, is linked to the strong respect that continues to be upheld in conducting actions known to be significantly impactful on the people as a whole; this respect is for the concept of Indigenous identity as being both individual and collective. The reality and accuracy of this statement has not yet moved the people to dislodge or transform the heavily imposed forms and networks that comprise the colonial architecture of Indigenous self-government and administration.

The challenges of a major transformation such as I have described anticipates decades of concentrated attention on internal efforts to empower the people-as-collective through intentional dialogue and discussion, that is power-ful communication through words of shared meaning. Relying upon, or referencing and interpreting the ancestral language of the people aligns with and strengthens individual understanding of contemporary topics, deepening experiences and quickening the mind's capacity to remember and re-integrate meanings from the past into the events and situations of today. I have utilized these strategies in graduate teaching courses related to Indigenous knowledge systems and Indigenous languages. Supporting students to learn or remember and practice words of their ancestral Indigenous languages

helps them to ease away from their personal apprehensions of shame and inadequacy because they don't understand or speak 'their language'. This is speaking to only one tiny aspect of one major Indigenous issue that lies hidden and waiting for our children, youth, and adult learners within Canadian education institutions.

Most First Nations and Indigenous peoples⁴ have not yet formalized the utterances and processes that will ensure the pursuance of their own objectives. Mission and vision statements, as well as written policies of principles and objectives are words, but these words are without power. Transformation within a people occurs at a deep and lasting level; addressing the issues of Indigenous peoples and communities effectively without shared meaning in the use of words amongst the membership of a people is not possible. Empowering words of all speakers and establishing ways for them to re-connect with each other through words and concepts of shared meanings is the first step to empowering words for transformation. The connection of words that spring from their ancestral language is significant to Indigenous peoples exactly for the power that becomes available to them through its usage.

The significance of the word in Canada's relations with Indigenous peoples is the bedrock upon which Canada stands and from which it shapes the bases and justifications for all actions taken in relation to anything Indigenous. Significant words present themselves in the form of Treaties signed between the (British) Crown as Canada and 364 First Nations⁵ representing over 60,000 First Nation members in Canada. The Numbered Treaties (1871-1921) are the treaties that impact Western Canada and the lands in Alberta on which Northern Cree and Metis people have lived for hundreds of years. As a Metis person, I am not a

⁴ In Canada at the present time, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada oversees Indigenous-government relations, including self-government. Through federal Land Claim settlement agreements, several First Nations have been formed in northern Alberta, including the Peerless Trout Lake First Nation, formed in May 2010. The people at Peerless Lake and Trout Lake are northern Cree of the boreal forest or Woods Cree. They maintain close social and kinship connections with Bigstone Cree Nation (of which most were members at one time) and the Little Red River Cree Nation. The knowledge system is bush/Woods Cree and the community sites have existed since the trading post era in 1870s and early 1900s.

⁵ See <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100028574/1529354437231> for a description.

First Nation member but the words, the language, the social context, the historical reality and aftermath are continuously present and the power of the words used and written in Treaty 8 are continuously active in the beings and lives of members of my family.

I have shared these thoughts not to give preeminence to language and words in the fulfillment of human capacity, but to suggest and acknowledge that many of the limitations we ascribe to ourselves as human beings are defined by the theories (or paradigms) that we accept or use to explain our ways of being and knowing. In this brief commentary, I have referred to the Treaties as one of the limiting paradigms created by the power of words. The same Treaty 8 in 1899 that impacts the lives of my family and relatives today, even though I am not a member of a particular First Nation, was the cornerstone for the creation of the Peerless Trout Lake First Nation through agreement. It was also the same means that permitted the Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada to 'settle' Indigenous Treaty rights and claims with Indigenous people without ensuring that Indigenous people, being signatories, understood all the words and concepts of the agreement. In other words, it was expected that the intent, purpose, meaning, and power of the words that were being used were understood by both sides of the agreement. I was not there but the written history is available to demonstrate how unlikely it is that the agreement evolved out of shared meanings, a sense of communion in communication, where for the Cree signatories their understanding of themselves as being both individual and collective in signing that agreement was in fact acknowledged, and embedded into the meaning of the words of the agreement.

The significant point that is consistently ignored - or denied - by Canadian settler society and its government is that the words being used in dialogue or discussion are not being used in a practice of shared meaning. The context for a meeting within shared meaning has not been created or prepared, and no party is accepting responsibility and accountability for the skewed outcomes of the meeting event: an outcome of benefit for one party and an outcome of destruction for the other.

An Indigenous paradigm ascribes power to many symbols, words being one type. Traditional protocols around Indigenous social and personal integrity include solemn consideration of such power, and individuals live with the knowledge and effects of such power every day of their lives. Although many of the Old Ways that expressly acknowledge the power of the word are now changed, recognition of such power remains. In the more isolated northern Cree communities, Trout Lake for example, many persons will not name themselves in introductions in any context. They consider such an expectation to be very rude. As it is commonly known that Canadian settler society adheres to this expectation and practice for most group meetings, most Indigenous people have accepted the need to introduce themselves as a matter of respect for the process.

Conversely, I have observed that people from the Northern Alberta communities that were once referred to as the “Isolated Communities”, including my community, are divided on how to think about and how to respond to such changes in social protocols. Those who grew up and are rooted in the Traditional ways of living and expressing relationships will avoid the naming of self in a variety of ways, e.g. by not being present at the start of the meeting. Or, if they do name themselves, they do so purposefully, as a matter of strength, aiming directly towards the meeting context. The self-naming then becomes a political act, and is not conducted as an action of introduction of self. This is a process that get repeated in many acts of social interaction protocols where Indigenous people are expected to use words in specific ways that accommodate Canadian settler society but, in fact, undermine Indigenous rules of respect in social interactions.

Dynamics such as the naming of persons indicate an Indigenous tradition of attending to the power of words as evidenced amongst the northern Cree and Metis. I have to remind myself that this knowledge is likely much more widely known at this time in our history than is being practiced. However, I also know that it is not being practiced partly because we as the old generation - the capans-greatgrandmothers, and the kokoms-grandmothers - have not been able to keep up with uncovering the buried trails used by our ancestors and removing the rubble that is continuously being poured on them through the colonial

agenda to keep them hidden. This knowledge, as with most of our ancient knowledge, has not been handed down to our upcoming generations in ways, means, and contexts that they can understand and put to immediate use. I am writing as one way to reach those who are searching. I know that everyone ends up searching for something to ground themselves, and this need will spring from deep within themselves in unpredictable ways and at unanticipated times. But they will hear it and recognize it for what it is – their own being crying out for its own knowing.

To continue, according to the Old Ways of respect, the names of those who have passed on to the other side are not spoken. In fact, connected to that protocol, and as well to other occasions, identifying relationships are used instead of speaking names. Persons can more appropriately be addressed directly or indirectly in terms of the speaker's relationship with them. The kinship structure amongst the Cree and their Metis relatives⁶ can be depicted by an extensive and very comprehensive mapping of linked identifiers. Every person in large extended families is likely to have a variety of personal connections that can be identified as effectively, and more appropriately through one of many terms of kinship; this practice carries more respect and contributes to the duration of the people. For example, a son or a daughter would address an older brother and older male parallel cousin (son of his father's brother or mother's sister) as *nistes*, and an older sister and older female parallel cousin (daughter of mother's sister or father's brother) as *nimis*. Words used to describe or ascribe relationships at the same time that they name persons are good examples of the power of words. They create and strengthen a relationship, giving it more life, at the same time as they name the person. In many ways, the decisions regarding usage of kinship terms in addressing another person is left to the speaker, and as such, decisions regarding the use of relationship terms instead of names are not disrespected or questioned, even if the term is not accurate in its designation.

⁶ The Metis are linked with a language referred to as Michif. Amongst the Metis people, most who know an Indigenous language will refer to that language as Cree. In fact, the word Michif originally referred to the person, the Michif or Metis person, and did not refer to the naming of a language. Michif was the language spoken by communities of Metis people, particularly in northwestern Canada (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta) and was a combination of Cree and French.

The power of words to create experience is also evident in words used in ceremonies. Songs that belonged to persons who have long ago passed on are still being sung today. The words of the songs came from experiences and the power of the words continued to evolve with new experiences. Today the vitality of the words provides the means to other new experiences. The power of the word in the mystical sense, where the word itself seems to create experience or being, is evident mostly in ceremonies and individual spiritual practices. Articulation of an Indigenous paradigm regarding the power of "word" is certainly based on a principle that is beyond the limitations of thinking and language, and comes imbued with the energy of creative powers beyond those controlled by human intellect and human being. A more detailed discussion of ceremony or ceremonies will not necessarily provide more clarity or understanding of this seemingly esoteric notion of the "power of the word". However, if we each take a moment to recollect an event of our own participation in a ceremony, we will undoubtedly also recall that the power of the word was a present and crucially operative element of the experience, whatever the source of the word. Ceremonies involve our spiritual beings in very particular ways, and this, along with the fact that the words within ceremonies usually do more than act as signifiers should in no way detract us from including these elements into this discussion.

I wish to elaborate on the name of this section, *Pehta way pitahkosowak*, in order to integrate several threads of meaning. This title carries several implied, enjoined and/or embedded points. Firstly, *pehta* /enjoins some other/others to listen, and secondly, implies in segments of the remaining words how the syllables fit together, that there are sounds belonging to some beings, that these beings are being heard, and that these beings are coming closer. There is nothing to indicate what sort of beings these are - they can be spirit beings or physical beings. The important part of the word in this case is that which indicates the movement of sound, the coming closer. What is it that is coming closer? We say through the language, "Indigenous voices", but we have not limited these voices to those persons who are or who can be physically present here today; neither are those voices limited to those present in this space at this particular time. Those voices can belong to those who have gone before us, to our grandfathers and grandmothers, to our spirit

guides. The one who hears the voices is the one who says *Pehta way pitahkosowak*, and is also the one who recognizes who it is that approaches. Within Indigenous reality, who is approaching determines how one listens and how one prepares to hear. It also determines how one acts. When every word of a language is similarly laden with meaning and direction for thought and being, it is not difficult to imagine and to understand the difficulties inherent in the notion of developing a shared meaning context for two conversants, or a shared paradigm between different worlds.

I have spoken briefly to several aspects of significant challenges involved in the development of shared paradigms across which different and distinct peoples must navigate in order to understand the power of (their) words in one language. In this case, the language may be shared through interpretations, but the full meanings cannot be shared, primarily because presence is crucial to any development of shared meaning.

Based on over half a century of lived experience as an Indigenous educator, and having served my own people and Canadian society as a certified public school educator and school systems administrator, and then as researcher and professor in a higher education institution, it became clear to me some time ago that it is we, Indigenous people, who must solve Indigenous issues. More importantly, it is we who must bring to the fore of our lives the knowledge systems that we were given by our grandparents and our peoples for the generations that we have been here on our own lands. The knowledge that we need so deeply is not to be found outside of our own ways. We have much knowledge from many other sources, other peoples included, but the integrating core must be within our own sense of knowing, lest we find ourselves trying to come back after genocide. By definition and from ancient knowledge, we understand there is no return from genocide of any sort. We can only become anew, and for me there is no noun to follow that.

What I have experienced and observed is that most people of Canadian settler society have limited or no knowledge or interest in any form or aspect of Indigenous reality. The pain of that realization, which I reached as a beginning teacher, was lessened significantly over the years by the

many students whom I loved and walked with, and who loved and walked with me. Within the sustaining strength of the earth and our ancestors who have not left us, I know that to consider seriously the articulation of an Indigenous paradigm of knowledge, language, and word that describes or explains the order of the world is an absolutely necessary task for Indigenous peoples. I also know that the articulation of such a paradigm will evolve as a part of our natural movement towards personal and individual fulfillment of human potential. Within that movement, we will want to talk to each other and to share our thoughts, to participate and experience ourselves consciously as members of the whole, the sacred collective, the antithesis of genocide. We will want to know, to experience, to remember and recognize concretely the beings from our past who have shaped us and who are with us as we shape our own world. These actions and events are the elements of an Indigenous paradigm that is already and that will continue to be. The ways that we choose, or discover, to give expression to this paradigm today are far-reaching and overarching, enveloping the collective as being immersed simultaneously in past, present, and future.

There is a fairly extensive body of literature that addresses directly the concrete structures of many Indigenous societies, and as well discusses the many and varied forms of oppression and injustice that seem often perceived to be a "standard" part of Indigenous life internationally. In education for Indigenous peoples, for example, relevant areas of study have included work by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational researchers in Indigenous languages, curriculum and program development, teacher training, student attrition and retention, student achievement, as well as family and community health and well-being. My point here is that there is already available enough of a resource base of knowledge to speak clearly to the issues of Indigenous students' failures to adapt successfully to mainstream schooling, and to speak clearly to the issues of Indigenous persons' failures to be acceptable or law-abiding members of Canadian settler society. There are enough resources already to speak clearly to the issues of Indigenous persons' failures to be rehabilitated successfully after their incarcerations and to speak clearly to the issues of poverty and to speak clearly to the issues of violence, both self- and other-inflicted. There is enough information available and readily accessible to know today that all such

knowledge is not sufficient by itself to bring about transformations in the reality that gives birth to these issues of Indigenous constant and continuous experience. If information was enough, then I think the concrete effects of such transformations would be visible and obvious to everyone of us as observers.

Further, this information will not bring about the will, the intent, and the hope that is required for the transformation of inhuman conditions of being - 'inhuman' in that they do not support the ongoing process of being/becoming human. Such conditions or structures of reality do not support the development of "the reflection and action which truly transform reality" and are "the source of knowledge and creation" (Freire 1983, p. 91). Yet Indigenous reality as it is being experienced daily is exactly this. This is neither to deny the small numbers of individuals who "make it" through the systems, nor is it to deny that transformation is continual and ongoing in Indigenous communities: the proof being our continued presence as Indigenous people.

In all this however, we live knowing that we are a part of a whole that operates outside the limits of time and space. This is the point of distinction between the Indigenous paradigm and the Freirean paradigm. Indigenous peoples are oppressed and we can use Freire's wonderful and eloquent lessons and indeed the same language for analysis and action, but we stand in a different spot when we reflect and we may even shift into a different state of being in order to prepare ourselves to reflect. Our actions, we know, will extend across time and space and therefore must be considered and intentional. We know too that our words are actions in the sense that they can precipitate change and transformation merely by the simultaneous actions of being spoken and being heard.

Freire helps to show us how words are used to take power from people. People whose words or language have been stolen are helpless and imprisoned within circumstances and situations they cannot affect or transform, no matter how negative or destructive these may be. The violence that is associated with ripping out a person's tongue cannot be more abhorrent and diabolical than stealing a person's words, very slowly, over generations of psychological tyranny maintained by

keeping people in states of dispossession, displacement, dependence and isolation.

How does a child begin to learn words that have become something repugnant? How does a child learn a language that comes clothed in anger, harshness and cruelty?

I remember this teacher. She was cruel and judgmental. She ridiculed my brother because he told her about a pie that our mother had made. He said it was an orange pie because he didn't know the word "lemon". She punished him and called him "stupid", but he was a child who hadn't seen too many lemons. How was he to know that she would hate him for that? He went to the Aberhart Tuberculosis Sanitorium about a year later and I believe strongly that there was a distinct relationship between her abusive treatment of him and his illness. I keep his story close to my heart because he is my brother still, and I remember his words and his life.

One more story about the power of words. I was told this story by a good friend. She visited an old couple who asked her for help. They had had a son when they were young. While the young mother was still in the hospital, she had a visit from the nurse who informed her that her healthy daughter who had been born a few hours earlier had died. The young couple mourned and left for home without ever seeing the baby or the body. After a while, they had another child, a son. This child was a healthy and happy three-year-old when a priest came to visit. He informed the parents that they could not take their son with them as they had planned on their seasonal move to a winter camp. The priest took the boy from them and they left. When they returned, the child was gone. They could get no information from the priest. Years passed and one day a car drove up to the house and a boy was let out into the yard. When the couple went out to see who it was, they saw their own son, now six years old. When they tried to talk to the boy, he was mute. He couldn't talk at all nor has he talked to this day. He is now a man in his thirties and still doesn't speak. The mother asked for help to try to find out what happened to her son that he can no longer speak. The couple do not have a command of the English language, and through or because of this, they were robbed of the most precious gift of creation: their own

child. Is that not a fairly high price to pay for the absence of words or personal power?

Archetypes against Indigenous Woman

In the same way that Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970) and I could enter into dialogue through a shared paradigm of knowledge on education, I discovered through advanced studies that I could understand and dialogue with the works of Carl Jung relating to archetypes, dreams, and consciousness. As a young Indigenous woman struggling to understand a different way of being in the world while, at the same time, having to work and live in that world, I found that Jung's work opened deep conceptual doors to Euro-Western knowledge and provided me with opportunities for understanding the ways and people within Canadian settler society. More importantly for this writing, I started to understand and articulate in words the bases of many of my experiences as an Indigenous woman interacting with persons and systems of this society of which I was not a part. The most important part of the whole of this learning experience was that I also started to realize, identify, and understand the ways that members and systems of Canadian settler society perceived Indigenous people, including me, and how their understanding of Indigenous people was flawed exactly because it was based upon their own knowledge system which could not interpret or construct accurate cognitive meaning from an Indigenous knowledge paradigm.

What had been theoretical knowledge for me up to that point suddenly became real, on the ground, lived experience. I had known that words and actions had the power to hurt, cripple, maim but I had never used words to hurt and I had never acknowledged the persons who had tried to hurt using their words. I had simply ignored and left those persons in their own world and paradigm of knowledge, as I had been taught.

Jung's work using archetypes to explain and understand human personalities, behaviours and experiences was an example of Euro-Western thought in dialogue with Indigenous thought in the areas of epistemologies and ontologies. Even without a dialogical positioning,

Jung's concept of archetypes has served to guide analyses of some of my own experiences.

One very significant reality for Canadian Indigenous women, and likely other Indigenous women, has been, and remains, the tensions associated with Indigenous woman and settler man interactions and relations. Several archetypes come into focus in the analyses of such interactions and relationships; the following narrativization of personal experiences and analyses of Indigenous women's experiences will demonstrate this.

For meaningful context, I came for teacher education from a small remote bush community in northern Alberta (present population of 370) to a major urban city in Alberta (present population of 1.6 million) in the late 1960s. Over the next decade, as an Indigenous woman, I encountered behaviours and attitudes from settler men that I had never anticipated and had to learn to interpret. For most of those years, I had no response to these behaviours and attitudes. In looking back 10 years later, from a position of professional experience and intense periods of critical community activism, I realized that "no response" was probably my protection, and that the strength of my Indigenous preparation for this journey was reflected in that response.

One set of those interactions with white settler men aligns strictly with the experiences and descriptions of Indigenous women in the Written Submission by the *Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women* (IAAW, 2018) to The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (NIMMIWG 2017). The submission begins with a sentence that addresses what I think speaks to one of the strongest points of denial and simultaneously one of the deepest and broadest, most applicable arguments in support of a strong global and national movement to tear off that scarlet target on the chest of every Indigenous woman and stop the violence in constant propulsion towards every mother's heart. Let me describe my experience first.

During my first year on the university campus, the daily walks from my rented space were interrupted at least once, twice or three times a week, with propositions from white men in vehicles. These propositions were usually innuendo, almost always sexual and often derogatory. Usually

if the first approach and comments received no response, the second would be negative, and occasionally threatening. I was not afraid and I made no response, not looking or speaking, or pausing in any way. My reflections on the events were brief.

Although I thought this was normal behaviour for young white men towards young women, I also had been taught by my sister and her friends that young white men would not necessarily have good intentions if they were approaching Indigenous women. Other than that advice, I had no experience or knowledge to advise on an appropriate response in those situations.

Years later, after the Inquiry of MMIWG came to media attention, I understood one day that I could so easily have been one of those statistics of missing and murdered Indigenous women. By then, I had also remembered the days when I was a child of about 10 years, overhearing my parents talking about how the oil industry had now become a part of Alberta's move towards resource extraction around our isolated communities. The oil rig workers were picking up young women from the community and keeping them hostage in their isolated bush camps for days, before dropping them back off again in the community. As girls, my sister and I were warned about the men and potential threats to our safety. However, I had not associated the violence and sexuality of that time period over a decade previous, with the present concern around relationships and interactions of Indigenous woman and white man.

More recently, along with many other women, I have begun to realize the immensity of the violent crimes that are being perpetrated against Indigenous women by the colonizing forces that have shaped and/or impacted settler society, men, and Indigenous women. These forces and different relationships within which many, if not most, Indigenous women must engage daily usually carry a potential for tremendous negative energy. The sources of negativity that tear or shred interactions or relationships between Indigenous women and settler society, including settler women and settler men, are dispersed and can be difficult to unveil. However, having lived with them every day of my life - as Indigenous woman and the man in uniform, Indigenous woman and

lover, Indigenous woman and the man on the street, Indigenous woman and the supervisor, Indigenous woman and the teacher, Indigenous woman with settler woman, I know that unveiling negativity in interactions and relationships may not be worth the effort required. The Institute for Advancement of Aboriginal Women (IAAW) submission quotes the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) in its first sentence: "The most significant new theme we identified in this process was the impact of racism." (p.2).

In my opening narrative, I refer to Jung to interpret the events as the unfolding of the Seductress/Siren archetype. "She" would be motivating the settler men's behaviour, and therefore the men could conceivably be simply victims of her power. I would extend this position to say that Canadian settler women would also likely be interpreting the effects of the Indigenous woman in relation to the White man as Seductress/Temptress, and would respond with resentment towards the Seductress' effect on settler men. I am not imagining this interpretation; I have observed that response and have been implicated more than once. In fact, it is a fairly common occurrence for Indigenous women to find themselves unwittingly accused being a Seductress, though usually not in those words.

A related situation with the Indigenous woman is being perceived as the Seductress when her husband or intimate partner, Indigenous or White, condemns the actions, appearance, and/or words of the Indigenous woman, perceiving these to be seductive to other men. Although this can and does happen with all women, the fact remains that Indigenous women have to deal with the Seductress depiction and its effects in disproportionately higher rates than Canadian settler women. I see the violence against Indigenous women as arising exactly from the ready labelling of Indigenous women as Seductress, an action which simply exacerbates their targeting by drawing attention.

There are a myriad of questions and factors to consider in addressing the labelling and targeting of Indigenous women, but most of them have little or nothing to do with the Indigenous woman. Being naturally beautiful and seductive is usually considered a gift and a good thing;

these qualities do not usually get a woman killed or hurt. Yet it seems this does not to apply to an Indigenous woman.

I have seen that other factors support the assigning of the Seductress archetype. In particular, it is used for defense and concealment of racially motivated violence. It springs from the inherited attitudes of colonialists that Indigenous women are objects to be used in any way a settler colonial chooses. Indigenous people are perceived to be one of the natural species of the forest, and women in that definition are simply natural, useful, and alive to meet the needs of the hunter.

Historical accounts of Canada have been written from many perspectives. One historical position addresses the marriages between European men and Indigenous women and focuses on the transformation of Canadian settler society from one that encouraged and socially acknowledged the marriages of Indigenous women and European men to one that purposefully restructured the lines of moral and social acceptance, excluding the marriages of Indigenous women and European men from acceptability. This transformation began after the arrival of the Christian churches and European wives into the colony of Canada in the late 19th century (Van Kirk, 1983).

As an Indigenous woman with a professional educator background, I can share endless narratives, elaborated with details on how the archetypes are revealed within the actions of formal representatives of settler society systems who are, most often, White settler men. However, with strong movement in institutions towards equity in general, it is Canadian White settler women who have gained ground, in attaining senior-level administrative and supervisory positions within settler systems. Decision-making power remains primarily then in the hands of Canadian settler men and women at the interface of Indigenous women and settler society.

The archetypes that come to mind in relation to my professional and academic work and community activism are as a revolutionary, warrior, and visionary. These are the descriptor words that have been thrown at me in a derogatory way by settler men administrators who felt challenged by my presence, my thinking, my work. Of note to me is that,

in these situations, once the supervisor has decided that I am against him, he also sees that as me challenging the system he represents, and if I persist, he starts to see me as challenging his society, and eventually his own personal existence.

In that process of his changing perceptions, the image he has of me goes from warrior, to revolutionary, then to messianic visionary. Being a Metis woman, it was very common in my work situation as a senior-level educational administrator to be accused of trying to live out a Messiah vision of myself. This judgement would be presented along with an oblique reference to Louis Riel at times. Once a Euro-Western archetype surfaced in an interaction with a supervisor, I understood how I was perceived as an Indigenous woman. The Witch, Teacher, Healer archetypes have carried both positive and negative energy in my life as an Indigenous woman.

The stories wherein a woman is accused or 'talked about' as being a Witch usually arise in response to any form of activism carrying potentially significant but undesirable outcomes for persons in positions of political and social power. If I as the worker with influence in the community cannot be unseated from my "power", removed from my position, or otherwise have my influence neutralized, then I must be a Witch.

In Alberta, and likely across Canada, in Indigenous communities, a human being is a spirit first, and the life of the spirit is expressed through the body, hence the sacredness in which a body is held. Knowing that this is a principle of how most Indigenous people consider a person, officials at every level of government have the opportunity to use this knowledge to serve their own ends in contexts related to Indigenous peoples and communities. In relation to this, the concept of self-government for Indigenous communities is not usually understood by the majority of the people who are being represented. This creates an easy opportunity for unethical conduct by any one of the multiple forms and levels of settler government committees who are responsible for serving, advising, and supporting the various divisions of service within the self-government body established to serve an Indigenous community. This type of administrative support is to be provided in

ways that directly benefit the community. Often, however, the community is unable to access necessary information and, without information and understanding of how to interpret that information, community members must rely wholly on what they hear and are told by their own self-government body and the overseeing settler government committees.

This is a typical situation where the Indigenous woman who is a community worker with a community-driven objective can be referred to as a “Witch”. In an Indigenous context, references to someone being a “Witch” will be communicated in ways that align with shared meaning contexts within the community. This will ensure correct interpretations within a particular Indigenous context. For example, “Witch”, an English language and Western settler culture term, can signify “witchcraft”, also an English language term, but one which will be readily interpreted or understood within a Cree Metis community as “Indian medicine”. That term is commonly understood by Metis Cree people, often leading people to experience apprehension, discomfort, and even fear because of historical and early family responses to church-related teachings, residential schooling, and the criminalization of ancient forms of spirituality and healing practices. The connotations can be very negative and most people will avoid using the term, except in very particular circumstances.

None of these actions will be understood by the settler society, but that is not even an objective because, from their position, the only significant consideration to hold to is the outcome: nullifying the influence of the identified Witch by the labelling and ensuing fear amongst the people. The outcome is predictable, in consideration of all impinging factors; the vulnerable mis- or uninformed majority of community people will fall back to the self-government body and the settler government/committee with oversight responsibility. They will move away from challenging either system and avoiding any form of questioning or information-seeking. This is an example of how Euro-Western frames of knowledge and interpretation undermine and support the ongoing stranglehold on Indigenous communities as a collective.

In summary of this discussion on how archetypal frames of analysis can be used in attempts to create dialogues within shared meaning, I want to say that archetypal valuations of Indigenous women are not likely to avoid racist, gendered, and debilitating descriptions and interpretations of Indigenous women's activities, morality, or characters simply because a general colonial resentment amongst settler society for the embedded sense of collective Mother as represented or inherent in Indigenous women will continue well into the future. Indigenous women have always, and into today, suffered lives of collateral damage under the centuries-long system of European colonialism; in the face of the strength of this Mother icon, this resentment is empty and leads to emptiness.

Indigenous people have always respected and upheld ancient teachings of power and the supernatural in relation to human lives; many people have never moved away from these ways and continue to uphold that position. The heavy-handed fracturing of intergenerational knowledge transmission has cost the easy access that Indigenous people once had to understand and to practice and to use that knowledge to the benefit of Indigenous people as individuals and collective.

Especially at this time of massive uncertainty around the globe, we remember that we have been given, and we can recollect, those ways we need for renewing the trust in our Mother and the grandfathers and grandmothers of the Great Mystery. That an Indigenous woman would be subjected to the Witch designation within an Indigenous community would only demonstrate how far we have moved away or been taken away from the strength, depth, and power of our own knowledge systems. However, based on my experience and observations, we have gathered a huge number of Western settler strategies that we can use to benefit ourselves as individuals, all the while asserting that we are a collective. In the midst of poverty and massive social needs and issues, the rewards for setting aside the collective whole of one are ever-present. The purpose of the Western settler society is to ensure that we do not forget the existence of the rewards that they offer. Our purpose is to support each other so that we remember that, indeed, we are both individual and collective.

In summary, this written expression of my personal thoughts and life experiences is grounded and interpreted from a consciousness formed in relationship with the land, encompassing trees, waters, plants, and all other living beings within the boreal forests or 'bush country' of northern Alberta. I will conclude now with a synthesis, perhaps a rephrasing, of the meanings I wanted to convey through the words and thoughts I have shared.

Without visible and obvious motions of harm towards us as Indigenous people and peoples, Canadian settler society and its members have maintained a constant assaulting barrage of policies, practices, and other attempts to change or transform us as Indigenous people. Through these forms of "encouragement", we are expected to accept and assist the settler state in a restructuring process toward the re-creation of ourselves. Wherever and whenever we do not accept, settler state intensifies the pressure and devises more subtle forms of impositions and strategies to turn us into settlers on the lands of our birth, the lands that have given us life, the lands that are shaped by the blood and bones of our ancestors. Indigenous women have always been given a special consideration in colonial planning and long-term objectives for turning Indigenous people into settlers.

We know that without the land, we as Indigenous people will cease to exist as Indigenous people. The most recent colonial strategy is to talk very loudly about inclusion, equity, diversity, and promising forces of new forms of human communication, communion, and shared knowledge and technologies. From direct experience, I have already seen and experienced the impacts of this strategy within institutions of higher education where the weakening and dissolution of Indigenous programs, policy directions, research, and pedagogies have been strategically planned, with processes of implementation ongoing.

The development, interpretation, and implementation of broadly accepted and unquestioned contemporary theories and policies of equity, diversity, and inclusivity is another powerful, convincing, and effective silencing strategy of Indigenous voices, at least in Canada. While equity and inclusion would likely never be set aside by any Indigenous peoples as a human value for human interactions and

behaviours, I have observed that one impact of these policies is the subtle removal and redirection of Indigenous people's positioning, locations, and forms of contributions within significantly impactful institutions and organizations. In important ways, the interpretations of these policies has resulted in the reduction of consideration, inclusion, and specifically Indigenous benefits to meet the needs and rights of Indigenous people as the original peoples of Canada.

Ignoring Indigenous presence, including on and from Indigenous lands, is an excellent strategy for a settler society; aside from silencing Indigenous voices, it assuages any settler self-doubts and moral questioning about their history in the dying of people and natural environments for other beings, on these lands that they have come to live on and call their home.

Speaking as the Crone

I want to end this 'speaking' as the Crone. During my years of professional practice in Indigenous education as an Indigenous woman, I found strength in experiencing myself as a spiritual being, as somebody connected to probably thousands of years of power and knowledge. And I called on that. I had dreams and visions that carried me through immense and lengthy struggles. I lived out visions and I have one yet unfinished. This perhaps sounds strange, but it is not; I am, after all, still here, and I am not sure I have understood that vision yet. I am waiting.

For closure, I want to share with you a personal experience as I sat outside the doorway of the room where my mother was breathing her last, with my youngest sister beside her. Our mother never had one day of schooling in her life; she knew and taught us how to protect ourselves so that we would never be lost from our own way of being or lost into the Western settler systems. We learned from her life how to keep our spirit connection to the reference point that had been established with our birth. In simple, powerful living, she who made life possible for all of us, passed from this side of the veil to the other.

The following words I offer as a description of a last event of her special teaching; it was created through her living, and brought forward in time and space to be given to us at her leaving:

There is no greater rift to live through than that between a mother and a child who cannot share a language. Like the woman lying on her bed, waiting, moving slowly into the consciousness held within the language she heard at her mother's breast, facing death and completing her life's journey with Cree words and Cree visions. Like the daughter, sitting quietly beside her mother, waiting, unshed tears burning through a mind screaming in English words while the Cree words of her mother softly break the silence, consuming their final hours. What greater presence of language and Indigenous consciousness than this to the woman who sits alone, unable to accompany her beloved parent returning to the world of their people of long ago. At this final moment of death, this moment of merging with the ancestors and the sacred power of the Great Mystery, with God, Jesus, Mary, a husband and a son. Grandfathers. Grandmothers.

A Savage Silent Calling for the Right to Be

I want to express my gratitude for this opportunity to speak and to be heard through this means. Indirectly, I have shared some tortured and some wonderful aspects of my life through the narratives, and I have been prompted to remember many more. The silent calling is always savage; it is the cutting, torn heart that refuses to die, the need to live just to insist with silent screams of beseechment to beloved children that "If you don't hear me, then you will die". The Mother in Indigenous women and in Mother Earth is there for all of us, and so the calling, the sounding, "Pitahkosowak" is the hope of Mother coming so that we can know that we are of her.

Indigenous women are the sinew that holds the people together in strength, to support the independent survival of the people. They know within themselves the spirit of the collective, and as the mothers of all, face deep challenges to their own wellness and survival as Indigenous women. Without them, the people as collective stumble, faltering when they need to stand and walk. Weakening the women weakens the

collective and weakens the land. The land itself needs the women and Indigenous life through the seasons reveals that clearly. Traditional Indigenous knowledge systems contain the teachings for our own understanding, and our own ways of acting in supporting the strength of our collective mothers, Indigenous women and the Earth.

In remembering and honouring our mothers, we become and are the bearers of the past; we are the links and if we refuse, walk away, or simply do not accept to carry the past of being within our presence today, then that past that is our own being today, simply falls away, and we no longer are.

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A Savage Silent Calling for the Right to Be: Life as an Indigenous Woman – Sakawikaskeyihtamowin

Cora Weber-Pillwax

Abstract I begin by talking about words, the pieces of dynamic cognitive immateriality that gives rise to human speech and writing. Words inevitably find meaning and human expression through dialogue,

narrative, imagination, and communion. Words arise through a person's being and knowing; they are shaped and given direction through feeling and sensing within the constant cognitive forward propulsion of 'living'. Words then require consciousness. In this paper, consciousness is acknowledged as a people's internal cognitive, spiritual, and experiential mapping of their home-place on earth. Consciousness begins with the land from which life springs and is sustained; it assures the attunement of human life with earth in every aspect of being. In considering my words as an Indigenous woman rooted within the land of Turtle Island as North America, I ask to be heard as one whose words have sprung from these lands - alive, vibrant, dynamic, continuous - words flung into the winds and carried on the breath of my ancestors, birthed and gifted life in this place, whose bodies returned to the earth, leaving their words for those to come. Herein, I share thoughts and experiences as an Indigenous Metis Cree woman of the boreal forests, addressing my discourse to three areas of impact in my life: significant Euro-Western archetypes in relation to the lives of Indigenous women; Indigenous women as human collateral damage in North American society and culture; and hidden reference points to strengthen Indigenous Metis women in North America. The three areas of focus are introduced and their content discussed using a multi-threaded presentation of contextual information, narrative empiricism, and embedded detail analyses. Conclusions offer syntheses derived from parallel processing of the whole content, and urge educators and other readers to constantly look forward, always acknowledging themselves as the careful bearers of the past.

Keywords Indigenous, consciousness, land, Indigenous women, Indigenous being, Indigenous lifelong education

Un appel silencieux et sauvage pour le droit d'être: La vie d'une femme autochtone – Sakawikaskeyihtamowin

Cora Weber-Pillwax

Résumé Je commence par parler des mots, ces éléments d'immatérialité cognitive dynamique qui donnent naissance à la parole et à l'écriture humaines. Les mots trouvent inévitablement leur sens et leur expression humaine à travers le dialogue, la narration, l'imagination et la communion. Les mots naissent de l'être et du savoir d'une personne ; ils

sont façonnés et orientés par les sentiments et les sensations dans le cadre de la propulsion cognitive constante de la « vie ». Les mots nécessitent donc une conscience. Dans ce document, la conscience est reconnue comme la cartographie cognitive, spirituelle et expérientielle interne d'un peuple par rapport à son lieu de vie sur Terre. La conscience commence avec la terre d'où jaillit et se maintient la vie ; elle garantit l'harmonisation de la vie humaine avec la Terre dans tous les aspects de l'existence. En considérant mes paroles en tant que femme autochtone enracinée dans la terre de l'Île de la Tortue, en Amérique du Nord, je demande à être entendue comme quelqu'un dont les paroles émergent de ces terres – vivantes, vibrantes, dynamiques, continues – des paroles lancées dans les vents et portées par le souffle de mes ancêtres, nées et nourries par la vie en ce lieu, dont les corps sont retournés à la terre, laissant leurs paroles pour les générations futures. Je partage ici mes réflexions et mes expériences en tant que femme métisse crie des forêts boréales, en abordant trois domaines ayant marqué ma vie : les archétypes euro-occidentaux significatifs en lien avec la vie des femmes autochtones ; les femmes autochtones en tant que dommages collatéraux humains dans la société et la culture nord-américaines ; et les points de repère cachés pour renforcer les femmes métisses autochtones en Amérique du Nord. Ces trois domaines sont présentés et examinés à travers une approche multiforme comprenant des informations contextuelles, un empirisme narratif et des analyses détaillées intégrées. Les conclusions offrent des synthèses issues du traitement parallèle de l'ensemble du contenu et exhortent les éducateurs et autres lecteurs à constamment se tourner vers l'avenir, tout en se reconnaissant comme les porteurs attentifs du passé.

Mots-clés autochthone, conscience, terre, femmes autochtones, être autochtone, éducation permanente autochtone

Un salvaje silencioso que reclama el derecho a ser: vida como mujer indígena – Sakawikaskeyihtamowin

Cora Weber-Pillwax

Resumen Comienzo hablando de las palabras, esos elementos de inmaterialidad cognitiva dinámica que dan lugar al habla y a la escritura humanas. Las palabras encuentran inevitablemente su significado y expresión humana a través del diálogo, la narrativa, la imaginación y la

comuni3n. Surgen del ser y el saber de una persona; se moldean y adquieren direcci3n a trav3s del sentir y el percibir, dentro de la constante propulsi3n cognitiva hacia adelante del «vivir». Las palabras, por lo tanto, requieren conciencia. En este documento, se reconoce la conciencia como la cartograf3a cognitiva, espiritual y experiencial interna de un pueblo respecto a su lugar de origen en la tierra. La conciencia comienza con la tierra de la que brota y se sustenta la vida; asegura la armonizaci3n de la vida humana con la tierra en todos los aspectos del ser. Al considerar mis palabras como mujer ind3gena enraizada en la tierra de la Isla de la Tortuga, en Am3rica del Norte, pido que se me escuche como alguien cuyas palabras han surgido de estas tierras: vivas, vibrantes, din3micas, continuas; palabras lanzadas al viento y llevadas en el aliento de mis antepasados, nacidas y dotadas de vida en este lugar, cuyos cuerpos regresaron a la tierra, dejando sus palabras para las generaciones futuras. Comparto aqu3 reflexiones y experiencias como mujer ind3gena M3tis Cree de los bosques boreales, abordando tres 3reas que han impactado mi vida: arquetipos eurooccidentales significativos en relaci3n con las vidas de las mujeres ind3genas; las mujeres ind3genas como da1os colaterales humanos en la sociedad y la cultura norteamericanas; y puntos de referencia ocultos para fortalecer a las mujeres ind3genas M3tis en Norteam3rica. Estas tres 3reas de inter3s se presentan y analizan mediante una combinaci3n de informaci3n contextual, empirismo narrativo y an3lisis detallados integrados. Las conclusiones ofrecen s3ntesis derivadas del procesamiento paralelo de todo el contenido e instan a los educadores y otros lectores a mirar constantemente hacia adelante, reconoci3ndose siempre como portadores atentos del pasado.

Palabras clave Ind3gena, conciencia, tierra, mujeres ind3genas, ser ind3gena, educaci3n permanente ind3gena