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Keeoukaywin: The Visiting Way—Fostering an Indigenous Research Methodology

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Abstract: *Decolonizing research methodologies are increasingly at the forefront of research with, for, and by Indigenous people. This paper highlights an Indigenous research methodology that emerged from my relationship with the Omushkego people, the Moose Cree First Nation (Moose Factory, Ontario, Canada), during my doctoral research. It presents a decolonizing process of doing research, with a specific research aim of drawing links between land-based pedagogy and milo pimatisiwin (the good life). Through this process, the community and my own experience led me to remember, reclaim, and regenerate what I came to recognize as keeoukaywin, the Visiting Way methodology. With relationality at its core, keeoukaywin re-centres Métis and Cree ways of being, and presents a practical and meaningful methodology that fosters milo pimatisiwin, living and being well in relation. This article shows how an Indigenous research methodology inspires social values, kinship, an understanding of women's contribution, and self-recognition in relation to the land, history, community, and values. Such a methodology further unsettles historical hierarchies of knowledge and inaccuracies about Indigenous peoples' ways of being, knowing, and doing.*

Introduction

Along with the emergence of Indigenous research methodologies, there has been a focus on their decolonizing capacity. Methodology defines the way in which research is approached and directed; from an Indigenous worldview, methodology draws on relational forms of knowing, doing, and being. Increasingly, Indigenous scholars and communities have positioned Indigenous ways of knowing, and relationality, as central to their research methodologies (Absolon 2011; Bagele 2012; Kovach 2009, 2015; Smith 2012; Wilson 2008). Indigenous research methodologies aim to revitalize our ways of living and being well in relation, and help us to remember what is important and for whom, as a way to reclaim teachings, songs, stories, values, dignity, and land. "To remember is a way to re-know and re-claim a part of your life" (Cajete 1995, 87).

In this article, I reflect on the various theoretical aspects of what I have come to refer to as the Visiting Way methodology. I explain later how the term *keeoukaywin* was gifted to me in the Cree language, and how this gift would redirect my research and inspire my return home. Within the context of my doctoral research, this article reflects on how *keeoukaywin* inspires decoloniality, and how it is vital to the continuity of living and being. Vital, as it richly textures everyday life. Vital, as it is how we come to know, and to re-know. My intent is to contribute to the growing body of literature and conversations on the important role of Indigenous research methodologies.

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This work is situated within the context of my doctoral research with the Omushkego people living in Moose Cree First Nation, with the support of Métis Elders, Métis and Cree scholars, and family. Situating the community itself as the focus of this article allows for an appreciation of the significance of the inquiry that led me to the visiting way as a Métis way of life. Considering methodology as a way of life influenced my concluding reflections, which point to some research challenges, as well as to the important distinction between relationship-building and relationality in research.

Toward a Methodology of *Keeoukaywin*

At the outset of my doctoral studies, I began the formulation of a community-based research methodology from inside the four white walls of my academic office. As a Métis woman from Saskatchewan living in Ottawa, with maternal ancestral roots in Red River, I felt distant from home, and from the Omushkego people's worldview of living and being well. Distant, because I had not yet visited. Distant, because I was not grounded in my own family stories and history. In other words, I needed to do the hard work—to slow down, take time, make the effort, knock on the door, sit down, listen, share, go to the land, meditate, empty myself, and be present, as my research on land-based wellness had taught me. My methodology lacked theoretical footing, and I struggled with what made the visiting way distinctive enough to stand on its own as a living practice anchored in theory. For this reason, I felt a compelled to explore a theoretical grounding of *keeoukaywin* for this article.

My first teaching was that there is nothing lazy about visiting work. On the contrary, *keeoukaywin* is practical, social, political, and spiritual. As Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson (2014) writes, visiting, according to the Nishnaabeg worldview, is "a sharing of oneself through story, through principled and respectful consensual reciprocity with another living being" (18). Similarly, Métis scholar Anna Flaminio's (forthcoming) work examines how an Indigenous "kinship-visiting" approach, from a Métis-Cree perspective, can resolve disputes, renew relationships, and foster safety, as embedded in our *wahkohtowin* laws. *Wahkohtowin* is about shared responsibility to kinship relations, both human and non-human (Macdougall 2010). Maria Campbell (2007), a Métis Elder, reminds us of this reciprocal relationship and responsibility embedded in life teachings:

> At one time, from our place it [*wahkohtowin*] meant the whole of creation. And our teachings taught us that all of creation is related and inter-connected to all things within it. *Wahkotowin* meant honouring and respecting those relationships. [It was] our stories, songs, ceremonies, and dances that taught us from birth to death our responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to each other. Human to human, human to plants, human to animals, to the water and especially to the earth. And in turn all of creation had responsibilities and reciprocal obligations to us. (5)

With this knowledge in mind, every living thing is then a keeper of *wahkohotowin*. For all these reasons, *keeoukaywin* holds great promise as it aspires to bring all the pieces back together, and lead us back to what is right; it is a relational obligation, a spiritual responsibility.

My first invitation to visit Moose Factory was during their annual Gathering of our People (GOOP) in 2012. This first visit led me to re-examine my research methodology from an Indigenous perspective, and more specifically, from the Métis and Cree worldview. The Moose Cree First Nation is located on the island of Moose Factory, Ontario, on the southern tip of James Bay. The Omushkego people refer to themselves in the Cree language as *ililiwi*.[1] They continue to lead a lifestyle intimately connected to the land. Some families still hunt in the spring and fall on their traditional ancestral territories. Yet the community is increasingly concerned about the fact that fewer people are visiting the land because of unemployment and a lack of resources, skills, and knowledge of the land, and because more and more of the Elders (knowledge-keepers) who grew up on the land are unable to travel. Health issues and the high cost of equipment, food, and travel are concerns discussed within the community, concerns that are supported by a recent study (First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study 2014).

The population of Moose Factory is approximately 2,500, with the main languages being Cree (three dialects) and English. Their land is part of the territory of Treaty 9, also known as the James Bay Treaty, which was established in 1905 between the Government of Canada and First Nations in Northern Ontario. As with many historic treaties in Canada, initial promises of prosperity were abandoned, resulting in great loss and hardship for the Omushkego people (Long 2010). These losses are all too familiar to Aboriginal peoples in Canada: near-losses of land, culture, inherent rights, decision-making authority over the land, traditional governance, dignity, families, and *milo pimatisiwin* (living and being well). HBC posts, Western economic influences, diseases, a clash of belief systems, and the establishment of Horden Hall, an Indian Residential School (IRS) on the island, have had a devastating intergenerational impact on people's connection to the land, access to food sources, the well-being of families, kinship governance systems, and Omushkego identity. The profound disrupting effects of these historical circumstances include addiction, psychological and spiritual distress, chronic conditions, and a negative impact on social learning and parenting (Bombay, Matheson, and Anisman 2011, 2013; Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 2004). The research shows the complex, extensive, and long-lasting effects of trauma transmission specific to IRS experiences. The IRSs involved direct and forced removal of children from their land, relations, families, and *milo pimatisiwin*, affecting their ability to uphold the visiting way and resulting in dire circumstances that eroded its integrity.

For the Omushkego people, living the good life—*milo pimatisiwin*—is directly linked to their connection to the land. In examining the correlation between well-being and connection to the land, my research revealed some of the principles of living and being well for the Omushkego people: knowing of what it means to be *ililiw* (a Cree person/a human being), understanding the history of Treaty 9 from a Cree perspective, knowing and living *pimatisiwin* teachings, having access to land-based food, knowing one's own environment, and knowing about one's relatives, which includes the ancestral ways of being in relation to the land and to one another (Gaudet 2016). These elements of the good life are interrelated

1 Dictionary of Moose Cree, Cree-English, Second Edition, 2015, Aanischaaukamikw Cree Cultural Institute & Moose Cree First Nation

and interdependent. Given that the Omushkego people's resilience is rooted in a complex connection to the land, the fostering in young people of Cree knowledge, values, and traditional skills is vital for the recovery and rebuilding of the Moose Cree homeland in the face of ongoing colonialism.

While I was doing my field research, the people were showing me a more practical approach to research: visiting. Allen Sailors, a Cree knowledge-keeper living in Moose Factory, demonstrated how hospitality and teaching—characteristics of visiting—welcomed my whole self to be present in his home and with his family. He explained that this included sharing emotions, knowledge, ideas, and food from the land. It was important for him to respect the visitor, and for the visitor to reciprocate, in this space of sharing and being together. He taught his view of relationality as participating in one another's lives and well-being. He also explained how the Cree people's generosity came at a cost, and how his people suffered as a result. He taught his wisdom in a soft-spoken tone, while his wife, Trudy, who is Métis (with the same last name as my mother), expressed generosity in her every action as she cooked her specialty of bannock on a stick, served tea, and made us feel at home with her laughter and stories in their outdoor family cookhouse. We excitedly shared our genealogies and old photos to find ancestral resemblances and to see if we were possibly related. As Kathleen Absolon (2011) explains in her work on *kaandossiwin* as ways of knowing, "Indigenous re-search is often guided by the knowledge found within" (12). My many visits with the people of Moose Factory during my doctoral studies profoundly influenced my eventual decision to return home to Saskatchewan to pursue my research interests; as Maria Campbell, Métis Elder from Saskatchewan, says, "Sometimes we make the journey away, but there are always times in our lives to come back for our survival. We need to reconnect" (Armstrong 2012, 32).

One afternoon while visiting with Maria, at her kitchen table in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, I shared with her how my entire research had shifted to re-centre on the methodology of the Visiting Way. Visiting was very prevalent in the community, and was often referred to when considering the old ways of learning, the well-being of young people, young mothers, and old people, Cree place names, and going out on the land. The importance of being visited by relatives, and by ancestors and the unseen in ceremonies and dreams, jolted something within me. Everything *pimatisiwin* was connected to visiting! I grew curious as to whether there was a word for this in the language. My host swiftly pulled out two different dictionaries, jotted down a few words, and reassembled them. Then she slid a piece of paper across the table and said, "Here's your word, spelled phonetically: Kee-Ou-Kay-Win" (M. Campbell, pers. comm.).

I held onto that paper for months and repeated it over and over, like a prayer. I became increasingly curious as to how *keeoukaywin* assured wellness in our Métis families. As I began digging, I realized that I could spend a lifetime learning about visiting as a way of being, what Anna Flaminio (2018) refers to as the "laws of visiting." During an earlier visit, in my search for clarity on Indigenous theory and methodology, Maria Campbell had urged me to go home. As she said, "Theory comes from the way you lived. It is inside of you. Go home, visit your relatives, visit the land" (M. Campbell, pers. comm.). The gift of

this word made me aware of how *keeoukaywin* was, and still remains, at the heart of how my mother, grandmothers, aunties, and sisters anchor a sense of belonging, a sense of self, and sense of responsibility to family, community, and land. The giving and receiving of this gift was made possible through visiting.

Visiting: Locating the Self in Methodology

As Indigenous people, we are no longer required to leave ourselves, our communities, and our cultural context out of our research and teaching practices (Absolon 2011; Kovach 2005, 2009, 2010, 2015). For me, situating myself is a way of belonging, revisiting places and relations, and remembering why this work is important. Through this process, I highlight what I learned from my experience of *keeoukaywin*, and the method of self-inquiry/self-reflexivity, described by Simpson as acquiring self-knowledge (Absolon 2011). In the Cree (Nehinuw) worldview, this is referred to as *kiskinaumasowin*, meaning teaching oneself (Goulet and Goulet 2014). Kovach (2009) explains, "As a reflexivity method of research, situating the self authorizes the expression of the relevant narrative from personal experiences, those reminiscences of life rooted in our earliest experience that shape our understanding of the world" (112). This self-locating has helped me to formulate and reformulate my understanding of being in right relationship with both the Moose Cree First Nation and my own Métis story. In doing this, I am called to situate myself as a visitor on the Omushkego homeland, a Métis person from Saskatchewan with a specific history and lived experience. In situating myself, I also position myself in terms of my relationships—to place, family, and identity. With every visit home, I research and reflect on stories of where my relations came from, how and where they lived, to whom I belong, and what compels me to pursue a methodology that fosters living and being well in our homes and communities. This is part of the ongoing work of visiting, and points to Kovach's (2009) comment that "seeking insights into Indigenous forms of inquiry causes me to revisit my identity, to retrieve my story from the archive of my being" (5).

Revisiting the Sense of Belonging to a People and a History

In the context of pervasive settler-colonial ideology and the constantly shifting politics of identity, making sense of "belonging" is a complex endeavour. Yet self-locating is a key part of decolonizing research methodologies. I begin this process by positioning myself in relation to the lineage of Métis women, kinship family, historical events, and place, in order to unsettle the Western colonial framework. I come from my mother, Norma Morrison, her mother, Auxille Lepine, her mother, Margaret Boucher, and her mother, Caroline Lesperance. They are the strong river Métis women, with roots in the Red River and St. Louis-Hoey, Saskatchewan. The social, economic, cultural and political changes of the Red River society and the compounding questions of race, land and acculturation bore increasing hardships and acts of resistance sparked by Métis families of the Red River. The transfer of Rupert's Land to Canada fueled the Métis peoples' fight for political and cultural rights and led to the displacement of some Métis families who made their new homes in the community of St. Louis and its surrounding area (Mailhot and Sprague 1985).

Given my mother's decision to marry Sylvio Gaudet, we six children grew up on my father's family homestead in a French-speaking hamlet. His family comes from St. Jacques D'Achigan, Quebec. His grandparents travelled westward and settled in Saskatchewan in the 1900s, when the state was offering land to settlers for agricultural purposes for next to nothing. It was a very difficult life, my father explains, yet it was a life that still granted settler privilege. We grew up predominantly influenced by francophone Catholicism, twenty kilometres from my mother's family land, where Métis presence remains strong, and yet is often forgotten in settler (historically referred to as pioneer) success stories. The old stories, the old language, and the old ways in which Métis people lived in relationship to the river, to each other, and to their extended kin are also being forgotten. With mixed economies, poor health outcomes, religion, social exclusion, displacement of women from their traditional positions of authority, and economic struggles, Métis and Cree perspectives on what it means to live and be well are often rendered invisible. Settlerism, whereby Indigeneity must be either replaced or eliminated, is well-entrenched, and rarely discussed publicly (Simpson 2014).

Growing up, we were instructed in Catholic beliefs; this is not unfamiliar to Métis people (Adese 2014; Fiola 2015; Macdougall 2010; Payment 2009). An annual Métis event involved going to the well-known shrine at St. Laurent Mission, located near the shores of the South Saskatchewan river. This was a time for gathering with relatives, and this gathering was an embodiment and outward expression of our kinship system. Most visitors to the shrine lived in the surrounding areas. Andy Boyer, a Métis elder, relative, and friend from Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, explained during one of our visits how the Métis campsites at the St. Laurent shrine were distinct. Settlers would set up camp individually, eat in their cars, come in to the church for services, and then leave. "The Métis people," however, "would settle themselves, make a fire" (A. Boyer, pers. comm.). Everyone knew which were the Métis camping spots, though they had no distinct markings. For days on end, Métis would move in and out of one another's camp sites, visiting, picking berries, and sharing food, brandy, stories, songs, and laughter. People would often forego church services because visiting was just as important, if not more so. This was part of the everyday expression of Métis spirituality; it was a way of being and relating to one another that was not restrictive, that was unscripted and yet responsive to the environment and to the needs of the present moment. The St. Laurent shrine remains a strong spiritual place for the Métis and Cree people in the area. Similarly, Back to Batoche Days, an annual four-day gathering of Métis people in the historic place where they relocated to traditional lands on the South Saskatchewan River (Payment 2009), where the 1885 Northwest Resistance took place, is another occasion where Métis people journey from long distances to visit their relations and renew their ties to the land and to their Métis history.

Keeoukaywin: Relational Ways of Knowing

In this section, I consider the theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of the social values, gender roles, self-recognition, and living practice I experienced through a relational methodology. As Simpson (2014) explains, theory, from an Indigenous worldview, "is gener-

ated and regenerated continually through embodied practice, and with each family, community and generation of people" (7). Inspired by Maria Campbell's teaching that *wahkotowin* lives within, I came to see methodology as a way of remembering our voices, stories, struggles, responsibilities, and each other. I have further observed how the space created by and for *keeoukaywin* helps "dig up our medicines," to borrow from Anderson's (2011, 3) research on life-stage teachings. Flaminio's (2018) research on *kiyokewin*[2] and its direct connection to kinship responsibilities, also known as the laws of *wahkotowin*, draws needed attention to how we can better forge our kinship governance systems by uplifting each generation. Well-being stems from the social structures of kinship, and strengthening kinship can help us to resist being categorized by the other and devalued by ourselves. Such an approach nudges the boundaries of settler privilege and puts into perspective how relational accountability, or rather relational responsibility, is embedded in *keeoukaywin*. This process of coming to know is caring, respectful, and grounded in self, place, land, and family.

Keeoukaywin: A Way of Being

The way of visiting is part of land-based societies' way of life. It guides the way we conduct ourselves, treat one another, and learn from one another and from the land itself. For Indigenous peoples, visiting creates and fortifies connections that unify and build community from the ground up. It is how humour, silence, news, concerns, pain, knowledge, ideas, and arguments are disseminated at a grassroots/ground level. Visiting may seem on the surface to be a passive and apolitical activity, but it is, in fact, political, re-centring authority in a way of relating that is itself rooted in a cultural, spiritual, and social context (Gaudet 2016). It provides a means of understanding Indigenous ways of knowing, relating, and doing. In seeing visiting as political, we can reconsider our conceptions of politics, who can do political work, and how political work has historically been done.

Makokis (2011) refers to the long-lived practice and protocol of *mamawi-kiyokeyahk* as a methodology that aims to build and maintain loving relationships, and to ensure the transmission of knowledge and language. "Visiting among people has been one of the central methods of language acquisition used in the practice and teaching between language learners and the teachers of the language [from] time immemorial" (Makokis 2011, 25). Similarly, Flaminio (2018) demonstrates the need for Cree and Métis ways of kinship-visiting to be applied as a methodological and procedural approach to help reconsider ethical legal practices when working with urban Indigenous youth. She explains how "Metis visiting was active and embodied, meaning we lived and breathed visiting through our daily and seasonal activities" (Flaminio, forthcoming). The way of visiting and its inherent ethics and protocols served many purposes, reflecting the Métis and Cree worldview that all things are created in balance.

Visiting as a way of being was most often expressed and taught by women responsible for the governance of their households, which included the making, preservation, and

2 The phonetic spelling of this term differs depending on the teacher, land-location, and region. In this article, I respect the spelling of each author cited.

distribution of food. The sharing of food is a key part of visiting (Anderson 2011; Kermoal 2016). Brenda MacDougall's (2010) research on Métis families and communities shows how women were essential in the anchoring of families in a specific region, the reproduction and continuity of culture and values, and the forging of strong relationships. Métis scholar Jennifer Adese (2014) argues that "Métis women helped to ensure ways of knowing remained vibrant, and responsive to new ecological contexts [that] allowed Métis peoples, as peoples, to survive" (58). And Leah Dorion (2010), another Métis scholar, provides evidence for the central role of women as first teachers through traditional parenting, and for the importance of returning to these practices for the wellbeing of our children and youth.

Gender plays an important role in *keeoukaywin*, given that visiting often occurred inside and around the household—the respected domain of women's authority. When discussing the importance of visiting with Karen Pine-Cheechoo, whom I interviewed in Moose Factory, she explained that it is women's way of being. Women's authority within the household is often overlooked as a key factor in the transmission of knowledge, yet from an Indigenous perspective, as Elder Jimmy O'Chiese explains, "everything comes from our home and everything is connected. … The home is to provide us the knowledge that was passed on. The teachings, future and guidance, prevention, protection and connection: these are the connection, the energy" (Makokis 2010, 23). Maria Campbell speaks to "how women own half the circle in our tradition" (Armstrong, 2012, 31). Métis-Cree scholar Kim Anderson's (2011) extensive research with Elders furthers this understanding through her research on the role of gender in life-cycle teachings.

During my time in Moose Factory, I was struck by one particular teaching regarding the intersection of gender and visiting. A member of Moose Creek First Nation Cree, formerly Métis, a family man and avid hunter, Sonny Morrison repeatedly and respectfully explained that his wife, Florence (Cheechoo) Morrison, was the decision-maker in terms of who came to visit and whom he could invite over for meals. He therefore saw checking in with Florence as no threat to his masculinity. On the contrary, he seemed proud to tell me this before making any visiting plans. Their home was considered a sacred space, and each was aware of their role and responsibility to ensure a loving and caring environment for family and visitors. Their thinking was reciprocal, in the broad sense, as expressed in the idea of "paying it forward." Witnessing and being a part of this form of lived respect that was given and shared grew into a set of ethics and protocols that informed my approach, and a longing to see more examples of healthy relationships. This experience gave me confidence to begin asking for guidance from the women (the aunties) who invited me into their homes, and the ones who reciprocated by visiting me in my community accommodations. Through the practice of visiting, women have a vital role in keeping families and communities together, passing on knowledge, and protecting kin and community relationships.

Sonny and Florence became friends and teachers, and in many ways helped me to understand Flaminio's (2013, 2018) graduate work in which she visited with Maria Campbell. Maria refers to the colonial breakdown of Indigenous kinship relationships and responsibilities as the "shattering of wahkotowin" (Flaminio 2013, 27; 2018, 86), whereby

First Nations and Métis people and their visiting ways were denigrated, and the practice of visiting was made difficult to continue. More research is required to further examine the effect of this kinship-shattering on *keeoukaywin*. I have often thought of this in the context of the violence inflicted on Indigenous women and girls, with the long-lasting disruption of *keeoukaywin* due to colonial policies, oppressive legislation, historical inaccuracies, medical and religious institutions, land displacement, shifting economies, and racism (Anderson, Campbell, and Belcourt 2018). Despite the layers and generations of aggression, visiting as a way of knowing, doing, and being has endured. For this reason and at this time, I have chosen in this article to focus on the ways in which *keeoukaywin* is still alive and intact within our families and communities.

During my social visits with Sonny and Florence and their extended family, and visits to the land-based camp, I was reminded of the gracious manner and the small yet significant gestures with which my mom, aunties, and grammas would prepare before visitors arrived. These included drawing the curtains, welcoming visitors at the door, making them feel at ease, preparing and serving their best food (often what came from the garden, land, and kitchen), and sometimes teasing as a gesture of acceptance. They served their visitors without interrogation or permission from the men. There was no formula, nor did they need one. They were guided by their intuition, sense of responsibility, love, and values.

In sharing my process with Andy Boyer, he too recalled the importance of visiting among Métis families. He spoke of how the first day of the new year was a special visiting occasion for Métis people. His mother, whom he referred to as the boss of the kitchen, would prepare large quantities of simple, typical Métis dishes: "boolets," fried "galets," corn, and potatoes. People from the community would come in and out of the house all day. His mother greeted each person at the door with an embrace. He recalls from his childhood that she treated everyone in the same manner. *Keeoukaywin* points to special times and spaces in which connections are strengthened, stories are heard, remembering occurs, and we are reminded of who we are and of our responsibility for the well-being of the whole. It offers an Indigenous view of community-based, participatory research methodology, and stands on its own as a viable methodology. *Keeoukaywin* goes beyond utilitarian function. It involves learning from within our own homes—what Sherry Farrell Racette, a Métis scholar and artist, refers to as the "kitchen table theory" (RezXTV 2017). She explains this kitchen table methodology as a reclaiming of women's spaces and ways of doing things. *Keeoukaywin* is a way of celebrating life, creating alternative knowledge, learning, and sharing, a living expression of *wahkotowin* that resists colonial dominance.

Keeoukaywin: Self-Recognition from Within

Keeoukaywin promotes self-recognition from within. It is a practical approach that subverts the need to be validated and legitimized within a "settler-privilege milieu" (Simpson 2015). This decolonizing process activates what Mignolo refers to in an interview as "de-linking" from the colonial logic reproduced over and over again, which upholds its intellectual hierarchy and continues to cause harm (Fernandez-Gaztambide 2014). And recognition

represents a cultural resurgence of what Denzin, Lincoln, and Smith (2008) refer to as an Indigenous approach that "addresses how Indigenous culture and epistemology are sites of empowerment and resistance" (9). This ties in with how Indigenous methodologies aim both to "disrupt homogeneity in research" (Kovach 2009, 12) and regenerate *milo pimatisiwin* (living and being well) in the lives of our families and communities (Absolon 2011). The intimate process of coming to know through *keeoukaywin* equips generations to recognize the gifts inherent within self, kinship, place, and land.

I learned that the Omushkego people's efforts to bring youth back to the land is in fact a political act of cultural resurgence to reassert their sovereignty and connection to the land. This act recognizes a reciprocal obligation, an exchange, and a responsibility to all living beings. It is an approach that "honors the cultural value of relationship, it emphasizes people's ability to shape and change their own destiny, and it is respectful" (Kovach 2005, 30). In this context, relationality involves a recognition of relationships and a commitment to reciprocity in order to uphold the well-being of our kinship relations. "It is a way of life that creates a sense of belonging, place and home. … Inherent in this way of life [are] reciprocity and accountability to each other, the community, clans and nations" (Kovach 2005, 30). Wilson (2008) refers to this as "relational accountability," which aims to promote balance and harmony. Self-recognition that is anchored in relationality brings us back to our bodies, allowing us to derive meaning and develop self-reliance in our lives. For Simpson (2015), internal self-recognition is the core building block of Indigenous cultural resurgence, as it promotes growth and a deepened love for land, family, culture, and language. Visiting leads to self-recognition, and the irrefutable knowledge that internal self-recognition is not a duty; it is a skill, a living practice that is strengthened over and over again through the way of visiting and being visited. It ensures that we develop a consciousness whereby we once again learn from and with the land. Some of the Elders that I visited with in Moose Factory often speak of the land as an extension of ourselves, and ourselves as extensions of the land (Gaudet 2016).

I have often reflected on Maria Campbell's teaching that the "land helps us see and feel differently" (Armstrong 2012, 32). Community-centred research in communities other than our own inevitably calls us back home to reconnect, to ground ourselves (Armstrong 2012). For myself, this included visiting the river, the fields, my gramma Lepine's old house, the cemetery, the Saskatoon berry bushes, and the old back roads. My research experiences as an outsider encouraged a deeper learning about my own Métis history, about the places my relatives lived, about our family stories, and finding balance by returning to my mother's community as a way of valuing the role of visiting again. In this way, *keeoukaywin* feels, at least for me, enriched by my recognition of self, land, family, and place. Simpson's (2015) description of recognition affirms that it is "about presence, about profound listening and about recognizing and affirming the light in each other, as a mechanism for nurturing and strengthening relationships to our Nishnaabeg worlds." Learning from place-based knowledge allows us to recognize ourselves in relation to one another and to the land, and to put an emphasis on what is too often absent: Métis women's stories, knowledge, and experience (Kermoal 2016).

Keeoukaywin: A Living Practice

As Kovach (2009) explains in her extensive work on Indigenous research methodologies, *Keeoukaywin* is practical, meaningful, and purposeful. While we, as scholars, are learning on the ground, *keeoukaywin* provides a living practice that involves respect for the past and present, and a means of its own continuation into the future. Many Elders and younger Indigenous scholars know this, which is one reason why they bring such spiritual and practical insights into living and being well (Anderson 2011; Dorion 2010; Flaminio 2018). Flaminio (2018) acknowledges visiting "as the way we are together, and the way we connect with each other" (79). The social purpose of visiting—once again, with a crucial recognition of the role of gender—offers insight into a way of being that maintains the ethical roles and responsibilities taught in life-stage cycles. Our ways of governing ourselves were directed by distinct roles and responsibilities rooted in life stages, from birth to death (Anderson 2011; Makokis 2011). Visiting, as both Anderson (2011) and Makokis (2011) point out, was part of the marking and acknowledgement of each stage of life. Female Elders were largely responsible for ensuring that family members were "grounded in their connections to kin, including ancestral kin" (Anderson 2011, 141).

Some of the land-based efforts of the Moose Cree First Nation's John Delaney Youth Centre, at which I worked, were focused on privileging life-stages teachings and ceremonies, because the community recognized how important these teachings were to help re-authenticate the Cree way of thinking about *milo pimatisiwin* (Gaudet and Chilton, 2018). Life-stage rituals, such as fasting, moon lodge practices, and questing, incorporated visiting as a way to accompany the individual in his or her spiritual learning. Although this learning is an individual process, its purpose is, for one, to be of service to land, family, and community. Carmen Chilton, Director of the youth centre, was guided by a holistic understanding of *pimatisiwin* teachings:

> Everything was integrated in the *pimatisiwin* teachings: governance, justice, spirituality, family, and community was part of it. It was done in accordance to the world around us and the seasons. We did not try to fit the world around us and we fit into it. We cannot schedule fasting until the buds formed around the trees. We worked with the natural cycles. The land told us when to do these things. (pers. comm.)

Together, we worked to ignite basic and practical life-stage teachings through the Youth Centre's land-based programming.

Kovach (2005) writes of the practicality of an Indigenous methodology; it is "born of the necessity to feed, clothe and transmit value" (28). It is practical and has purpose, with an emphasis on being organic and reciprocal. I would add that an Indigenous research methodology is concerned with both the feelings you leave with, and the feelings you leave behind. As mentioned at the outset of this article, visiting as a way life became clear through my research. It was central to the community's land-based initiatives for youth. As Omushkego Camp, owner William Tozer shared that "a natural bonding occurs, just letting youth visit, share and be together. Their days are not filled with keeping them active

and entertained. We like to keep it simple. … We are here to learn the land and from the land" (pers. comm.). Re-centring around the land as the primary teacher is supported by various Indigenous scholars, and is reflected in the principles of Indigenous research methodology. Coulthard (2014) argues that land-rights politics must include relearning how to be in right relationship with one another and the natural environment. Indigenous research methodologies disrupt rigid and individualistic approaches to research whereby researchers attempt to predefine questions, processes, and the contributions of participants, without consideration of relevance, responsibility, or relational accountability.

The Gifts and Challenges of *Keeoukaywin* in an Academic Context

Keeoukaywin was more than appropriate in the context of my study with the Moose Cree First Nation. In fact, the people showed me that it was necessary in reinforcing the significance of Indigenous ways of relating, being, and doing. I learned that the way of visiting is part of Cree and Métis cultural, political, social, and spiritual relationships. As Flaminio's (forthcoming) research on creating deliberate visiting spaces for urban Indigenous youth reminds us, quoting Cree scholar Neal McLeod, "it [visiting] is the backbone of Cree culture and language." The Omushkego people living on Moose Cree Island, in a difficult-to-access place at the southern tip of James Bay, guided me, without ever telling me directly, to revisit deliberately and to reenergize my relationship to home and connection to land, and to recognize *keeoukaywin* as a Métis methodology as well. I wanted to live and to understand better a methodology that was clearly vital to the community's land-based initiatives, and to what Smith (2012) refers to as "re-ordering and re-constituting ourselves as Indigenous human beings in a stage of ongoing crisis" (39). The visiting way unsettles historical inaccuracies about Indigenous people, such as their being lazy, dependent, uneducated, and worthless, and restores diplomacy by asserting an ethics of care, transparency, and accountability to our kinship relations. Once again, the ethics of visiting can be interpreted as political. As Indigenous researchers, being accountable to our relations signifies a call to build trusting relationships and to uphold respectful connections beyond the duration of our research. We have to ask ourselves continuously how we can give back, and how we can uphold respect, receptivity, and reciprocity while being mindful of what our research may unsettle.

There are challenges and complexities tied to decolonizing research methodologies, given that "good" research is still viewed as tied to the dominant forms of knowledge-making, such as Western forms of inquiry. Academic and administrative pressures, travel and living costs, the rigorous criteria of scientific publications, the push for tenure, funding uncertainties, and project timelines present further, formidable challenges to the visiting way in Indigenous research. Academic pressures come in the form of expectations to publish in prestigious journals, internalized fear of failure, and the desire to transmit knowledge that speaks to both the academy and the community. Because my research project was based in a difficult-to-access community, the high cost of travel and accommodations posed particular challenges for visiting. At its outset, this project did not take into account the way of visiting as a viable part of its methodology. It can take a significant amount

of time to foster trusting relationships, and in my case, I also lived far away from my Métis relatives. Pressures to meet project deliverables within a certain timeframe upheld a Western notion of project "success." At times this resulted in my feeling inadequate or agitated, which may have had affected my relationship to the community, and its relationship to me as a researcher. As well, visiting was not always possible. Sometimes I travelled to the community and assumed that people would be available to visit at my convenience. Eventually, I learned to be humble, to trust in the process, to respect the lifestyle of the people, and to put aside my own preconceptions about successful research, such as following the script of interview questions and distancing myself from the research. I also had to acknowledge my own responsibility for what information was shared, and to learn to relax in the face of difficult topics such as stories and details of family struggles, ongoing systemic violence, and the politics of land. Certain times of year, such as the spring and fall hunts, were not optimal for me to be in the community, as many were out at their family camps. Project goals, such as those of the Milo Pimatisiwin land-based initiative for youth, had to be implemented within their respective timelines, with specific deliverables according to the funding agreement I had signed.

Building relationships requires a form of active participation that must meet Western standards of meaningful researcher-community engagement. But relationality, which is at the centre of Indigenous research, is more complex. It works in conjunction with social values, living practices, relationships, life cycles, and Indigenous self-recognition. I was struck by my own discomfort with visiting during my field research. In my experience, the way of visiting at times unsettles the isolation that creates barriers and upholds spaces of privilege and uncertainty. *Keeoukaywin* insists that participating in research also involves fully participating in life; this required me to visit those disowned parts of myself that I had ignored or avoided as a way to cope. I also needed to visit with those parts of myself and bring them home, to revive my aliveness in the most loving way possible so as to upgrade my value and worth. There is a certain amount of self-responsibility to come face-to-face with what and where we are. The visiting way can serve us in leaving no part of ourselves behind, returning to the principles of wahkotowin, and as the late Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009) put it, "taking back our spirits." Through this process, our ways, spirits, songs, teachings, and families can be uplifted in the fight to preserve that which is so vital to life.

Keeoukaywin should not be confused with the notion of "relationship-building" embedded in the principles of community-based and participatory action research methodologies. Relationship-building in a Western context focuses more on problems and how to arrive at better solutions or outcomes, rather than trusting in a process with unforeseen or unscripted outcomes. I suggest critically rethinking and self-examining the approach to relationship-building. The traditional approach involves keeping an objective eye on the other, with the aim of legitimizing the research through measureable outcomes and results. It assumes an external position of acquiring knowledge from the other, and does not consider or address what happens in the relationship, the feelings brought up during visits, or the well-being of self, family, community, and the land. This is not to say

that the concept of relationship-building does not have a place in research; however, we must consider its theoretical and epistemological footings. What I propose is that it not take up the entire space, and that we be cautious that it not dictate our research efforts. Otherwise, we risk becoming rigid, deficit-focused, and incapable of listening deeply or recognizing the light in one another, and thus producing knowledge that is not relatable or relevant to the communities themselves or helpful to our own healing.

At the same time, framing research as an intervention to help Indigenous peoples improve their lives, an approach prevalent in Western thinking, involves an assumption that Indigenous peoples are incapable of properly managing their own lives, and that their methodologies are unstructured and therefore illegitimate with respect to ways of being, knowing, and doing. By perceiving Indigenous peoples through historical inaccuracies, we risk replacing Indigenous methodologies and perspectives with a compartmentalized view of living and being well. We further risk dismissing the Indigenous theoretical and epistemological underpinnings of Indigenous methodologies that are embedded in culture, peoplehood, language, place, and political, spiritual, and social context. We therefore risk not recognizing *keeoukaywin* as the main artery of our family systems, our mobility, and our way of thinking, doing, and taking care of one another, or its influence on our political decisions. Throughout my doctoral work, I was invited to remember (to re-know and to reclaim) the fact that the spirit of visiting leaves room for the unpredictable, for empathy for all living beings, for recognition, and for gender balance, and that it therefore cannot be approached in a settler-Canadian fashion.

Keeoukaywin assures that knowledge, teachings, dreams, and stories are mobilized through social and political relations, social values, life cycles, and language; it is therefore a living, creative, and holistic practice. The focus on Indigenous knowledge systems within Indigenous well-being research is often contextualized in terms of Indigenous resurgence and connection to the land. This resurgence and connection to the land has many threads, both visible and invisible, including ways to re-centre land, family and community, and to highlight our sharing ways, most often upheld by women through the generations. Through my journey, visiting with the Omushkego people and revisiting my home to learn more about Métis women's ways of knowing, being and doing, I have remembered that we create caring, deliberate visiting spaces in our homes and institutions and through our pedagogical approaches, all of which are infused in the medicine of *keeoukaywin*.

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