Land, life, and knowledge in Chisasibi: Intergenerational healing in the bush

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Abstract
In 1980, the Fort George iiyiyiwich[1] were unceremoniously moved across the James Bay to the present-day community of Chisasibi - a place not of their choosing. The impacts of a cumulative range of stressors, from residential school abuses, mercury poisoning, and land loss from hydroelectric development, as well as overt paternalism from both governments and settlers working within Cree institutions, have disrupted family structures and undermined individual and community wellbeing. Nevertheless, the land, as much as it has endured, still offers a place and space where relationships of respect and love can be rebuilt and strengthened. This paper explores the connections between autonomy and wellbeing by presenting a land-based healing program developed by the Cree Nation of Chisasibi. The program functions as a social movement in response to social suffering caused by colonization and land loss, which aims to renew social relations as well as reconstitute and reaffirm contemporary Cree identity. Although it is intended as a culture-based healing program for youth in need, the delivery method is largely educational. The program was conceptualized by elder Eddie Pashagumskum, who shares iiyiyiu (Cree) knowledge about personhood and relationships that are rooted in his personal connection with the land and the ecosystem.

Keywords: *land-based healing; wellbeing; Cree Nation of Chisasibi; Indigenous autonomy; decolonization*

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[1] plural form of Cree person (iiyiyiu, also spelled eeyou)
[2] Other Cree communities such as Mistissini hold retreats in the bush as part of a repertoire of culturally safe

Introduction

While the scope of this article does not permit us to expand on the collaborative aspects of the research presented here, we would like to briefly contextualize our relationship at the onset. Introductions are important because they honor and acknowledge the intent of our relationships. As elder Eddie Pashagumskum (Pash) explains, before we set out to do something, it is important to introduce ourselves "so that we know who we are and why we are here".

The research presented here is the outcome of a long-term collaboration between Ioana Radu, a settler PhD student at Concordia University (Montreal); Larry House, a Chisasibi iiyiyiu and community advocate; and Eddie Pash, a Chisasibi iiyiyiu, cultural resource, and elder. Our encounter was synergistic, in the sense that it came about through a series of converging processes directed at improving community wellness in the broadest sense. At the beginning of 2009, Ioana was developing her research on youth participation in resource development decision-making when she was invited to facilitate a community consultation on health and social services in the Cree Nation of Nemaska. Larry, at the time the Cree Health Board community representative for Chisasibi, wanted to begin a similar process in Chisasibi and invited Ioana to facilitate a symposium in the community in 2010. The initiative became a collaborative research project aimed at documenting healing initiatives in Chisasibi.

As the project advanced, Eddie and Larry began to document a land-based healing program that Eddie wanted to develop and eventually establish on a permanent basis on his family's hunting territory. Thus, the Chisasibi land-based healing program was born. It is informed by the knowledge of the Chisasibi elders who stress that the land and cultural traditions have healing power that can enable individuals in distress deal with pain and self-hurt (CNC, 2012). The program is part of a repertoire of culture-based healing activities that reflect the needs and priorities of community members, as well as locally negotiated models of care. The decolonization of health and social services in Chisasibi aligns with the movement towards reclaiming Indigenous ways of healing and wellness in Canada and elsewhere.

The field research was conducted by Ioana and includes a video ethnography of one of Eddie's land-based programs that took place in April 2013, the lectures given by him while in the bush, as well as Larry's and Eddie's reflections on colonization and decolonization.

The article begins with a brief presentation of the Chisasibi land-based healing program. It is followed by an outline of the relevant literature on Indigenous healing in Canada, which introduces the healing model used in the program and its pedagogical applications in the context of decolonization in Chisasibi. We conclude with a discussion on the role of healing for decolonization.

Finally, approaches to decolonization, education and healing are varied, transitional, relational and creative (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2012). They are specific to particular nations, communities, groups within communities, and individuals. Often, they are informed by personal histories, experiences and ontologies that, as we have, come together to inspire and build opportunities for change and living a good life. Therefore, this is our perspective, as we understand it. We can only teach you what we know.

The Chisasibi land-based healing program

The Chisasibi land-based healing program was developed in 2012 by Eddie Pash and is delivered on his hunting territory. It is the first formal and structured[2] land-based program in Eeyou Istchee[3] (Cree ancestral territory). The program promotes personal, family and community wellness from a perspective rooted in iiyiyiu pimaatisiiwin (Cree way of life). Its mission is to strengthen the ability of participants to lead a healthy, fulfilling and resilient life. Ultimately, the program aims to improve the mental health of individuals so that they can effectively participate in the life of their family and community and make positive contributions to the collective development of their Nation (CNC, 2012).

As knowledge keepers, Eddie Pash and Elder Noah Snowboy deliver and guide this culture-based model of healing by teaching Indoh-hoh[4] (Cree bush skills), and values embedded in them, in the Cree language. Because a majority of participants struggle with addictions, the program focuses on treatment that promotes harm reduction, personal responsibility and harmony of relationships. Harm reduction is thus understood as helping clients move away from self-harm to a state of being that promotes holistic wellness, which may or may not include total abstinence.

Although the program is available to all community members irrespective of age, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation or spiritual practice, so far, it has provided services for young community members (18 to 30 years old males) that were either self-referred or referred by the Chisasibi Justice Committee (not necessarily as a sentence, but as a diversion option)[5]. The choice of participants has therefore been organic, responding to the most pressing needs at a given time, as well as respectful of the participant's personal choice and readiness to partake in the program. This approach is in line with cultural safety theory in the healthcare system in Canada and elsewhere. Specifically, cultural safety uses a person-centered model of care that situates overall health within the cultural, historical, economic, and political (the social determinants of health[6]) context of the service users. In addition, cultural safety calls for a critical analysis of institutional discrimination and colonial relationships by challenging the power imbalances inherent in the relationship between the health care provider and the

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[2] Other Cree communities such as Mistissini hold retreats in the bush as part of a repertoire of culturally safe intervention and knowledge mobilization initiatives. To our knowledge, the Chisasibi Land-based Program is the only one that has developed a structured manual that sets out mechanisms for interagency collaborations in terms of intake, case management and aftercare.

[3] Also spelled 'iiyiyiu aschii'

[4] See the glossary at the end of the article for a detailed definition of the term.

[5] The program functions as a restorative approach to justice as opposed to retributive justice currently employed by the courts.

[6] Broadly defined as living social conditions that affect health (e.g. housing, education, employment, gender, race, etc.). For details on social determinants of health in Indigenous contexts see: Reading & Wien, 2009.

Indigenous health care recipient. Cultural safety aims to shift this imbalance by empowering the care recipient to actively participate in decisions regarding his or her health (including the type of treatment and care used) while also building the health care providers' cultural competencies that foster a respectful bicultural encounter. Finally, a cultural safety approach to care requires a systemic transformation of not only the encounter between the professional and service user, but also of institutional power imbalances with the goal of decolonizing the health care system and strengthening local autonomy (Baba, 2013; Bascoupe & Waters, 2009; Smye et al., 2010; Ramsden, 2002).[7]

Since 2012, the land-based program has held 8 bush trips (intakes) with 25 participants completing the program, including three clients that participated in three intakes (repeats). Each intake consists of a two- to three-week stay at Eddie's bush camp located 500km east of Chisasibi and accessed by the Trans-Taiga road. The group is usually composed of 6 to 8 participants, Eddie Pash and Elder Noah Snowboy, as well as the program coordinator William Bearskin and camp helper Linda Bearskin.

Figure 1. April 2013 Land-based team.

From left to right: first row: William Bearskin (program coordinator), Eddie Pash (elder), Mike Wong (film crew), Wesley Washipabano & Martin Labe (participants); second row: Linda Bearskin (camp coordinator), Daniel Bearskin, Johnny Bearskin & Gabriel Bearskin (participants), Noah Snowboy (Elder), Robbie Bearskin (participant), Abdul Butt (film crew), Ioana Radu (researcher). In the background the waashaaukimikw built by the participants.

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[7] For more details on cultural safety see: HCC, 2012; IPAC, 2009.

The typical schedule includes morning lectures given by Eddie and an afternoon bush activity (hunting, fishing, trapping - depending on the season), followed by an evening lecture and/or group discussions. One-on-one counselling with Eddie or Noah Snowboy takes place on an ad-hoc basis - either at the request of the participant or as part of the bush activity (e.g. harvesting techniques used and how they relate to personal or environmental health). Lecture topics may include: history of iiyiyiwich (Cree people) before modern transportation, living in harmony with nature, navigational mind, healing as an ongoing process, and others. In order to promote life-skills and harmonious relationships, participants are expected to contribute to the upkeep of the camp by cleaning and cooking, chopping wood, bringing water and helping each other. A typical day schedule may be structured as follows (reproduced from CNC, 2012):

Time	Activity	Content
Morning (8AM-12PM)	Opening Prayer	
	Forgiveness	The story about a victim's father forgiveness of the person responsible.
	The impacts of hydro development	Social: loss and grief Environment: loss of Eeyou Istchee Ongoing impacts
After noon (1PM-5PM)	Hunting teachings	Survival Health
	What has hunting got to do with abuse?	Killing animals for nothing Killing game for more than you need. Bragging
	Bush activity: Ice fishing (night lines/nets)	
Evening (7-9PM)	Jealousy (within you and towards others)	Laughing at people, not asking advice from peers, etc.

It is important to stress that the program is not as structured as the above schedule may imply and instead it follows the natural rhythm of life in the bush, as well as emerging circumstances. For example, during the video ethnography[8], Eddie alternated between English and Cree to facilitate translation, taking into consideration that some participants were not fully proficient in the Cree language. In addition, during this trip, three days were spent constructing a waashaaukimikw[9], again to facilitate the research being conducted by keeping the participants together. Eddie indicated that he alternates between this group activity and sending the participants alone in the bush. The individual activity is designed to help them reflect on the topics covered in the lectures, as well as their application to the particular life circumstances of the participant. It also helps manage interpersonal relationships by instilling self-confidence in the bush skills learned or defusing tensions, if necessary.

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[8] A 30 min documentary is available here: www.chisasibiwellness.ca/land-based-healing-program

[9] A dwelling made of four upright poles with poles tied horizontally across the top.

The land-based healing program has served as an example for other Cree communities and was formally institutionalized[10] by producing a program manual that is now used by the courts as a sentencing alternative for Chisasibi offenders, as well as by the local social services department for referral purposes. The program is part of a repertoire of culture-based wellness activities in Chisasibi and aligns with the broader movement towards reclaiming Indigenous ways of healing and wellness in Canada.

Indigenous healing in Canada

Indigenous healing is neither monolithic nor static but a contemporary expression of knowledge systems and values reflecting the rich cultural diversity of Canada's First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities (NAHO, 2008). It is a concept that is both diverse and multiple, reflecting particular conceptions of identity, place, culture, empowerment and responsibility (Adelson, 2001, 2009; Waldram, 2008). Indeed, each practitioner makes use of various treatment methods that best respond to his or her client's needs (herbal remedies, sweats, ceremonies, bush retreats, etc.) and operates within specialized fields of practice (involving spiritualists, midwives, healers, medicine women/men, or herbalists) (Martin-Hill, 2003; NAHO, 2008).

Healing is invariably described as a transformative and continuous process (Waldram, 2013). It is transformative in the sense that the objective is not necessarily to 'cure' the individual in the biomedical sense, but to empower them to make the right choices in life (Adelson & Lipinski, 2008). In other words, healing is a "developmental process in which the patient undergoes changes in physical, behavioral, cognitive, emotional, social, spiritual, and/or existential functioning" (Waldram, 2013, p. 193). The cognitive emphasis of healing helps the individual understand his/her past actions and behaviors, to accept the difficult realities of life and tackle them 'head-on', and ultimately to take responsibility and commit to a healthy social life (Fiske, 2008; Gone, 2008; Waldram, 2014). It constitutes a process of learning, a developing of life-skills and the ability to apply them "in a conscious manner in all that life brings normally and abnormally" (Fiske, 2008, p. 48).

Sometimes described as 'work', and because its goal is not curative, healing is understood as a continuous process. On one hand, personal transformation and commitment take individualized time and conscious effort. Change doesn't happen overnight and as a learning process, new knowledge is internalized in a gradual, cumulative and incremental way (Fiske, 2008; Gone, 2008; Waldram, 2014). Symbolically, healing is described as a journey (the "Red Road," the "Sweetgrass Trail," the "Way of the Pipe") that is fraught with challenges, as individuals need to remain vigilant throughout their lives (Waldram, 2008). On the other hand, as much as it is centered on personal responsibility, healing is also a community and collective

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[10] In this case we mean that the manual sets out mechanisms for interagency collaborations in terms of intake, case management and aftercare. Referrals are currently done on an ad-hoc basis, either at the request of the service users (in the case of social services) or by the Chisasibi Justice Committee. The land-based program is not administered or managed by a Cree institution; it remains a grassroots community-based program and is guided and delivered by Eddie Pash.

process. What individuals are healing *from* (addictions, violence, depression, loss, etc.) is understood as a manifestation of social suffering caused by colonization and contemporary systemic oppression (Adelson, 2000, 2001; Irlbacher-Fox, 2009; Waldram, 2014). Adelson (2001) defines social suffering as "the embodied expression of damaging and often long-term and systemic asymmetrical social and political relations" (p. 273). Or as Irlbacher-Fox (2009) states, "the various social pathologies afflicting Indigenous communities in Canada, a complex of disease and unwellness, poverty and social issues, often referred to as 'Third World conditions' common in Indigenous communities" characterize the collective expression of social suffering (p. 29).

In the context of healing, then, the 'work' of individuals consists in understanding the historical as well as the contemporary trauma implicit in social suffering. From a historical perspective, colonial policy and especially the residential school system, "wrought complex and contradictory understandings of the world that distorted traditional teachings and undermined social foundations from which family structures and child-rearing practices took meaning" (Fiske, 2008). From a contemporary perspective, ongoing injustice prevalent in all spheres of Indigenous life (from government negotiations to policy, as well as neoliberal capitalism) creates cycles of oppression – an interplay between biased information that leads to stereotyping, discrimination, and prejudice. Thus, systems of advantage, privilege, and disadvantage, created and maintained by social injustice, place Indigenous peoples in a considerably disadvantaged position, evidenced in poorer health outcomes compared to the rest of Canada (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009; McGibbon, 2012). The 'work' that healing implies from this perspective calls for concerted community and collective action to acknowledge the history of abuse *and* to create supportive and safe conditions for individual healing by challenging the systemic oppression present in institutions (both local and governmental) and reflected in contemporary policy (Fletcher & Denham, 2008). Healing is therefore a collective political and self-empowering intervention.

Healing on the land: The Chisasibi healing model

Despite long histories of displacement and encroachment experienced by all Indigenous peoples in Canada, the land continues to provide traditional foods essential to good health, a space for self-reflection and renewal, intense physical activity required in everyday life, joy and love in the interactions with family and friends, and experiential learning through interactions with nature and topography. The bush is often seen as a 'place of healing' that enables individuals and families to strengthen and renew their physical and spiritual bond with the land (Adelson, 2000; Fletcher & Denham, 2008; Kirmayer, 2004; Kirmayer et al. 2009). As Luig et al. (2013) underline: "Learning and well-being are life-long intertwined processes that emerge from a field of interrelationships that include individual dimensions of mind, spirit, and body, as well as social and natural environments" (p. 22).

The Chisasibi land-based healing model recognizes the healing power of nature and the 'return to the land' as a way of connecting individuals to Cree culture and language; as promoting intergenerational knowledge transfer; and offering a safe space in which individuals can share personal experiences and detoxify (when necessary). Although it is intended as a culture-based treatment program for youth in need, the delivery method is largely educational. The program was conceptualized by Eddie Pash, who shares iiyiyiu knowledge about personhood and relationships that are rooted in his personal connection with the land and the ecosystem.

Storytelling is employed to underline the Cree ethos of living a good life. Stories of bravery, survival, respect and forgiveness provide a foundation from which participants can draw strength and make sense of their particular personal contexts. The overall approach is very flexible to accommodate different personalities and needs of the participants. As the following story illustrates, Eddie's approach teaches participants to pay attention to the central role of experiential learning for wellbeing:

> If you are sad or down and you go fishing, something is bound to happen to help you. When we went fishing probably you were not aware of what happened. It is amazing what happened, you witnessed it. We asked nature to help us experience something that we needed to heal. When things like that happen, go back and try to see what we asked for and what happened. We caught a fish, we got all excited. But the fish got away. Then, we fished with a bare hook, with no bait. But we caught it. It was the biggest fish. It just happened. Something can happen if we ask nature to give us something to go by. We remember and are excited. We all felt it. We can say thank you to nature for giving us something we needed, thank you for sharing.

Thus, Eddie's healing pedagogy incorporates three interrelated aspects of experiential learning: the land and nature, the Cree concept of wellness (miyupimaatisiiun), and intergenerational knowledge transfer. Because Cree life finds its ultimate expression in its interaction with the land and nature, these essential elements are central to healing.

Nature takes care of us

The constant interaction with the land, by knowing it with all five senses, guides individuals and provides what is needed to live in harmony with the environment, with each other, and with oneself. The reciprocal and dialogic relationship with nature provides not only the material needs but also the ethic, moral and spiritual underpinnings of living a good life. As Eddie explains:

> If I am stressed or worried or sad, for me nature and what we have gone through [surviving on the land prior to settlement] helps me. If I sit down in the middle of the woods with all this pain, what am I going to do? If I look up I see all the trees. If I look at the tree that is alive and well, beautiful…how did he become like that?

> He didn't get mad at anybody to be like this. Ask nature to take care of you. Don't be afraid to talk to the nature.

The bush therefore provides a space and a place for self-reflection. Through the vigorous activities necessary for survival on the land, the bush also provides strength and resilience that help individuals deal with contemporary community life (Adelson, 2001; Kirmayer et al., 2009). The mastery of bush-skills therefore reflect an "ordered and productive self" that is in line with Indigenous conceptions of wellbeing (Fletcher & Denham, 2008, p. 121). For Eddie Pash, the relationship between the individual and the land and nature are articulated in terms of respect for the living resources and their spirit. Showing respect in everything one does, hunting activities, game handling and food preparation, as well as maintaining the bush camp, ensures harmonious relationships between individuals and with the ecosystem. Maintaining harmonious relationships implies responsibility for oneself, for others and for the community:

> All through these traditional ways of living we respect nature. If you respect nature, you have to respect each other too, and you have to respect yourself. How did I ever survive [when I was young]? Because nature respected me, in return I have to respect myself. This is the most important part. Respect is a gift in our traditions, because it is the way to be happy.

In its various contexts, healing thus functions as a mobilizing agent towards action, a call for taking responsibility for finding solutions to self and communal empowerment by using culturally appropriate and locally negotiated forms of action (Adelson, 2009; Kirmayer et al., 2006; Tanner, 2008). Going in the bush, participating in a sweat lodge, sewing moccasins, fishing and trapping, cooking geese, and many other cultural activities are all healing practices. Healing thus anchors and shapes identity in line with the local cultural ethos of what it means to live a good life:

> In the imagery common to many Aboriginal cultures, good health is a state of balance and harmony involving body, mind, emotions and spirit. It links each person to family, community and the earth in a circle of dependence and interdependence. (RCAP, 1996, vol.2, p. 57)

Living a good life

The psychological and social afflictions that healing aims to redress are conceptualized as consequences of the loss of culture and identity. Hence, healing is often understood in terms of cultural reclamation (Gone, 2008) or recuperation (Adelson, 2001) with 'culture' as a treatment modality (Waldram, 2013, p. 196). In other words, culture-based healing creates and restores the "order of the community and the relationship to the environment, the larger cosmos and with it, the sufferer's experience of meaning and morale" (Kirmayer, 2004, p. 41). The Cree way of life, or iiyiyiu pimaatisiiwin, reflects the ways in which individuals interact with the land and, more

specifically, harvesting activities, including the activities of hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering plants and berries, cutting wood for personal use and other related activities which are central to life in the bush.

For the Cree of Eeyou Istchee, miyupimaatisiiun (to be alive and well) means that an individual is able to hunt and trap and pursue other land-based activities, that he or she has access to good food (game meat and anything that comes from the land) and warmth, and is able to enjoy life and to participate actively within the community (Adelson, 2000; CBHSSJB, 2004; Tanner, 2008). It includes the biomedical concept of health (or absence of disease), but moves beyond it by linking the body to the land and identity. From Eddie's perspective, healing in the bush, especially for younger generations, means learning about their ancestors, reconnecting with history and the physical landscape, as well as reappropriating the Cree ethos of relationality:

> Every time you meet people, doesn't matter who it is, you treat them the best way you can. To be a friend to everybody, it leads into the respect for the environment and people. Sometimes they say the white man is different but in our society, when you say respect, you respect any human being. That is how I was taught, and don't say that you are more important than anybody else. We are all equal.

Thus, fostering positive relationships is the principal goal of Indigenous healing. In our case, respect, responsibility and relationality are foundational values that help participants rethink the way they engage with each other and find purpose in their lives. Since iiyiyiu pimaatisiiwin embodies an active and respectful presence in the world, miyupimaatisiiun depends on adults teaching and setting an example of healthy living and sustaining harmonious relationships. The responsibility of maintaining and strengthening miyupimaatissiiun is therefore contingent on active intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Teaching and learning on the land

While they vary in their specificity, healing practices foster cultural belonging by strengthening intergenerational bonds and transfer of knowledge. The cultural reclamation, within which healing is situated, involves a learning process with knowledge keepers (Elders, traditional counsellors, healers) as teachers, and with participants as students (Simpson, 2001). The process of learning is bidirectional, as knowledge keepers share their personalized experiences through storytelling and personal narratives; the students then situate themselves within this framework, apply culturally specific interpretations, and in turn share their own understandings. As Simpson (2011) explains:

> We can access this vast body of knowledge through our cultures by singing, dancing, feasting, dreaming, participating in ceremony, apprenticing with Elders, practicing our lifeways and living our knowledge, by watching, listening and reflecting in a good way. Ultimately we access this knowledge through the quality of our relationships, and the personalized contexts we collectively create. (p. 42)

Indeed, for Eddie, the healing model is not understood as therapy in the biomedical sense (as treatment of disease) but as a learning experience that is rooted in his personal connection with the land and the ecosystem, as well as the teachings that his elders passed on to him.

> I like to welcome these young people into this. You know, is like the way it was for me, I try to prepare things for them. How happy I was [as a child], to greet each other in a Cree way, my traditional way of living. I was born and raised with these traditional ways. This is how I came to know a lot of this. Now, I can only teach what I know, and that is the traditional ways. Out here we are tapping into tradition. Where I came from I had lots of practices, and they [the young people] do not have the chance, the chances I had, to know who I am and where I came from.

The treatment programs presented by Waldram (2008) also underline personal experience as the site of meaning making and source of knowledge used in various healing contexts. The bidirectional interaction of the counselling session underlines the pedagogical aspects of healing as "therapists were simultaneously patients learning from their clients as they continued on their own healing journey; and clients were simultaneously therapists offering their own troubled life experiences as a reflective tool for self healing by the therapists" (Waldram, 2008, p.7). Indigenous counsellors and healers involved in these programs invariably used their personal experiences with addiction and family violence as well as their healing process as a teaching tool (providing coping skills) and to validate the healing process itself (embodying healing as 'role models').

In the context of the Chisasibi land-based program, intergenerational learning also functions as a tool for cultural continuity and empowerment. As witnesses of iiyiyiu pimaatisiiwin, elders have the responsibility to guide the younger generations in the determination, exercise and practice of iiyiyiu decision-making and governance. As Eddie explains:

> I try to teach them to know where they come from in order to carry on what we [elders] are doing. We need the young people to carry on what we know[...] We have to come into this thing about the government part of it. When the government decides, we have to follow. If we don't follow that, they will probably get us into trouble. I am supposed to keep my traditions but the things that are leading me off are following the government regulations and laws[…] Now, we came from here, from the land. We survived on this land. Our ancestors lived through this land and they had laws, just like the government has laws. Now, we follow those laws. That is why you keep your traditional ways.

Healing and decolonization

The relational links between self-determination and wellbeing bring to focus healing as the process by which this relationship is developed, nurtured and redefined, depending on specific

local contexts. Kirmayer (2004) shows how material circumstances, as well as the symbolic effects of healing, reflect social and political institutions and ideologies, and as an integrated system, they are "part of local worlds of meaning and power" (p. 46). While the specific practices and approaches to healing are highly localized, they point towards "a lifetime of communal process in which Aboriginal individuals should help one another to cope with the harmful effects of both structural and personal violence" caused by colonization and neo-liberal policies (Schouls, 2004, p. 95; see also, Martin-Hill, 2003; NAHO, 2008; Waldram, 2008).

Indeed, by exploring Cree healing practices embodied in local annual gatherings and other community-wide cultural activities, Tanner (2008) and Adelson (2001) found that healing functions as a social movement in response to social suffering caused by colonization and land loss, which aims to strengthen and renew social relations as well as reconstitute and reaffirm contemporary Cree identity. For the Whapmagoostui iiyiyiu "this ongoing, conscious, and imaginative process begins with the summer Gatherings but resonates within the community the rest of the year, as people continue to reimagine and renegotiate their cultural and political worlds" (Adelson, 2001, p. 97). Thus, the movement from the "private world of individual health and wellness to the political domain of social wellness" (Conradi, 2006, p. 47), or community healing, is part of the broader projects of decolonization that aim to resolve communal tensions and create a sense of belonging and empowerment (Kirmayer, 2004; Schouls, 2004). Healing is therefore a relational process that fosters spaces in which social and familial bonds are strengthened and make possible community conversations about what is needed to mend local relationships that is in line with Indigenous life-worlds. For the Chisasibi iiyiyiu a healthy community is,

> […]a place where people feel at ease with one another, where visitors are welcome in our streets and our homes[…]It is made up of healthy individuals, confident of who we are in the world – where we came from and where we are headed. Healthy communities do not just happen. They require concerted efforts on the part of all members of the community, community organizations and the leadership. The process of healing requires a balance between education and support services. Healing can only take place one step at a time, at a pace that the community can keep up with. (CNC, 1998, p. 49)

Healing therefore presents an interesting entry into an examination of decolonization because it reflects subjective and objective power dynamics and cultural ethos at both the individual and communal levels; anchors identity and Indigeneity at specific temporal and physical sites of production; elucidates process of cultural change and continuity; and functions as space and means of political resistance and empowerment. In other words, healing fosters decolonization by empowering individuals and communities to engage in transforming the Indigenous-State relationship. In our case, politicizing care-giving practices and reorienting health policy for critical social justice contributes to decolonizing the health care model.

Decolonizing health and social services in Chisasibi

The Chisasibi land-based healing program was developed within a broader community and regional self-determination context that began in late 1960s. The political mobilization of the Cree Nation was a direct response to the provincial push to build the La Grande hydroelectric complex. In 1972, the court-ordered injunction led to negotiations between the Cree and the Inuit and the provincial and federal governments that resulted in the first northern comprehensive land claim to be settled in Canada, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement (JBNQA) signed in 1975. In 1980, as a result of the damming of La Grande River, the Fort George iiyiyiwich were unceremoniously moved across the bay to the present-day Chisasibi - a place not of their choosing. The impact of a cumulative range of stressors from residential school abuses, mercury poisoning and land loss from hydroelectric development, as well as overt paternalism from both governments and settlers working within Cree institutions, have disrupted family structures and undermined individual and community wellbeing (Richardson, 2008). Integrating community visions of care and wellbeing continues to be a priority for Chisasibi, a priority that mobilizes and expands contemporary self-government policy and institutions.

　　Among the many provisions of the JBNQA, Section 14, Chapter S-5 legislated Cree control over the management and delivery of health and social services and formally recognized Cree values and traditions in regard to the development and delivery of services. In 1978, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) was created to manage and administer health and social services for the Cree and non-Cree populations in Eeyou Istchee (Torrie et al., 2005). Despite the legislative authority recognized by Section 14, community-responsive service development and delivery reflective of Cree ethos has only recently been implemented following the signing of the CBHSSJB Strategic Regional Plan (SRP) in 2004 (Torrie et al., 2005). This implementation gap was due to the failure of both governments to properly and fully implement Section 14[11]. The more recent agreements, the Paix de Braves (2002) and the Agreement Concerning a New Relationship Between The Government of Canada and the Cree of Eeyou Istchee (2007), resolved, in part, Cree grievances with respect to non-implementation of the JBNQA, including health and social services as well as other provisions relative to economic development, resource exploitation and environmental protection[12].

　　Among the measures outlined in the SRP, the CBHSSJB has initiated a process to determine the future directions and integration of culturally-based 'Cree Helping Methods' within the current health system (CBHSSJB 2004, p. 29). In Chisasibi, this process was initiated by Larry House, who, as a Community health representative, felt that the CBHSSJB did not meet its responsibility to engage community members in defining a vision of wellness and care that responded to local needs and priorities. Working with the local Miyupimaatisiiun Committee that acts as liaison between community members, the band council and the CBHSSJB, Larry focused on mobilizing community participation by organizing two symposiums on health and social

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[11] See Torrie et al. (2005) for details of the administrative evolution of the CBHSSJB.

[12] See Feit, 2005; Salée & Levesque, 2010.

services and two round tables on iiyiyiu healing.[13] These initiatives helped determine local needs and priorities in terms of health and wellness, as well as identifying culture-based programs (both on the land as well as community-based) that were in line with local ethos of care and wellbeing. The aim was to create spaces in which community conversations can take place to negotiate understandings of "relationships to land, cosmos, and spiritual traditions embodied in their healing and ceremonial practices" (Iseke, 2013, p. 36).

In line with the cultural safety perspective, we have recently focused on addressing local and regional institutional power imbalances by increasing local autonomy in service provision and integrating Indigenous approaches to care. The development of a manual for the land-based program is one aspect of this work. We continue to collaborate with the local Miyupimaatisiiun Committee, the Chief and Council, as well as the CBHSSJB through the Nishiiyiyiu Department[14] to validate the healing model developed by Eddie Pash and integrate it in the health and social service provision, as well as in the justice system. In addition, we have initiated training for Community Addictions Workers in collaboration with the Nechi Institute (an Aboriginal organization that teaches culturally safe intervention methods). We believe that developing the local capacity is key to effective service provision and to strengthen local autonomy that is grounded in iiyiyiu knowledge and way of life.

Autonomy and wellbeing

Healing is by no means static but actively and continuously renegotiated. The various treatment programs presented by Waldram (2008) have shown that healing is reflective of an Indigeneity firmly embedded in both place and wider process of decolonization. As such, healing is always part of a response to external destabilizing forces that are in turn specific to physical and temporal contexts. In exploring the meaning of miyupimaatisiiun, Adelson (2000) shows how Cree culture is part of the reorganization of the present through a recuperation of history and identity in order to respond to external threats and to create new power structures. The Whapmagoostui annual gatherings link the community "not just to a precolonial past but to a present and future that include a growing range of what will constitute Indigenous beliefs and practices" (Adelson, 2001, p. 96). In other words, a Cree ethos is the foundation to achieve decolonization.

By reconstructing healing as political resistance and as a site of identity and cultural renegotiation, we can better situate and contextualize particular decolonizing practices. Concerns about the land, identity, belonging and empowerment that call for individual and collective responsibility in communities may not at first seem concerned about decolonization, as they do not necessarily engage with explicit normative Indigenous-State relations. The frames that healing often operated within are at best strained and at worse still inscribed within the State's

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[13] For more details on this local mobilization see Radu & House, 2012.

[14] Formerly known as 'Cree Helping Methods'; nishiiyiyiu is roughly translated as 'contemporary Cree'.

neocolonial paradigm (Alfred, 2005; Coulthard, 2007; Ladner, 2003). To assume that formal agreements, such as the JBNQA, guarantee full autonomy to local communities is to negate the contemporary systemic oppression that is alive and well within local institutions as well as in policy (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009; McGibbon, 2012). From our perspective, decolonization lies at multiple sites and operates within a view of local collective empowerment. We are grateful for the benefits that flow from the political mobilization of the Cree Nation and the resultant agreements that have secured extensive rights and provided resources for self-government institutions. Nevertheless, we want to bring attention to the important work that our community members are doing in order to better frame and operationalize these benefits to address their own realities and achieve miyupimaatisiiun as they understand it. Indeed, as Simpson (2011) states, "living in a good way is an incredible disruption to the colonial narrative in and of itself" (p. 41).

Conclusion

Efforts in Chisasibi regarding implementation of iiyiyiu healing in the health and social service delivery is one of the examples where community members create and strengthen local socio-culturally relevant institutions, and define their own goals that correspond to their expressed needs. The land-based healing program developed by Eddie Pash is one aspect in a series of decolonizing practices that are operating in the community. The stories shared by Eddie underline that respect, love and forgiveness are key to healthy relationships and that by understanding their personal and familial histories, the participants can cope better with the multiple stressors in their life. The historical context of the community, from residential schools to the flooding and relocation, is explained in terms of unresolved grief and hurt that impact the emotional state of individuals. With this, the participants are therefore able to better understand their own state of mind and be more gentle and loving towards themselves and their community. Healing in this case, aims to transform the "psycho-affective facets of colonial domination" so that individuals can come together and dismantle the remaining structural assemblages of contemporary colonialism (Coulthard, 2007, p. 456).

    While individuals commit to healing and participate in land-based programs, the community context often remains unchanged. Efforts in Chisasibi are made to develop both the human capacity and the programming to ensure an effective continuum of care based on culturally relevant and safe approaches. Indeed as Alteo (2008) underlines:

> The decolonization process requires a lifetime of deconstruction of colonized
> habits of mind, attitudes of the heart, and physical behaviors as well as reclaiming
> of Indigenous spirit. It happens moment by moment, emotion by emotion, idea by
> idea, and relationship by relationship. (p. 45)

The collective effort in Chisasibi implies that everyone is doing their part in decolonizing the mind, body and spirit of the community, the best way they know how. It is about each individual finding what *they* hold sacred and honoring it in everyday actions. Even though decolonization is

only rarely expressed as such, for those that have been involved with this project, decolonization means caring and loving for one another and invigorating the body with the effort of surviving on the land. It includes openness to the world and the recognition that decolonization is a collective and creative undertaking, of making something new from the everyday encounters, and more importantly, of creating inclusive spaces for these encounters to continually take place.

Glossary

Eeyou Istchee – Cree ancestral territories (eastern James Bay, Quebec)

Iiyiyiu/eeyou – a Cree person

Iiyiyiwich – plural form of Iiyiyiu

Indoh-hoh – Cree cosmology that informs life in the bush including Cree bush skills/harvesting activities (including the activities of hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering plants and berries, cutting wood for personal use and other related activities which are central to life in the bush).

Miyupimaatissiiun – being alive well

Nishiiyiyiu – contemporary Cree person

Pimaatisiiwin – Cree way of life

Waashaaukimikw - dwelling made of four upright poles with poles tied horizontally across the top.

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