



## Narrative

# Un-learning and re-learning: Reflections on relationality, urban berry foraging, and settler research uncertainties

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## Abstract

In this reflexive piece, the authors consider the unexpected lessons learned while undertaking a collaborative research project with their home institution's Indigenous Learning Centre on urban berry foraging. The faculty member questions the ethics of settlers undertaking this work, even if in collaboration with an Indigenous community, alongside the promises

of this work to critical food studies. The practice of urban foraging is understood as a wider metaphor for Indigenous worldview, and for different ways of being and relating. The student's reflections weave together themes of learning outside the classroom, with family and community, and the holistic aspects of doing research.

**Keywords:** Urban agriculture; land-based learning; settler and Indigenous relations

## Résumé

Dans cet article réflexif, les auteures examinent les leçons inattendues apprises en entreprenant un projet de recherche en collaboration avec le Centre d'apprentissage autochtone de leur institution sur la cueillette de fruits en milieu urbain. La professeure s'interroge sur les enjeux éthiques liés au fait que ce soit

des personnes issues de la colonisation qui entreprennent ce travail, même si c'est en collaboration avec une communauté autochtone, ainsi que sur les promesses de ce travail pour les études critiques sur l'alimentation. La pratique de la cueillette urbaine est comprise comme une métaphore plus large de la vision

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autochtone du monde et des différentes façons d'être et d'établir des relations. Les réflexions de l'étudiante entremêlent les thèmes de l'apprentissage en dehors de

la salle de classe, avec la famille et la communauté, et les aspects holistiques de la recherche.

## Introduction

In an era of truth and reconciliation, settlers have been called on to engage in processes of decolonization and anti-colonization<sup>1</sup> and to denounce colonial knowledge systems that continue to marginalize Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island, including in university spaces. As a queer-identified, white, settler academic living and working in Treaty 6 territory, I take seriously the responsibilities to learn Indigenous ontologies, epistemologies, languages, and teachings. My learning and un-learning journeys over the last fifteen-plus years have included recognizing my own positionality as complicit with dominant systems of power; attending and supporting political rallies and protests that call out ongoing colonial violences; attending Indigenous talks, workshops, and ceremonies; working alongside Indigenous students and communities; reading and assigning Indigenous authors and academics in the courses I teach; and acknowledging the sordid history that western academia has with Indigenous peoples and their knowledges. These learnings and un-learnings have been iterative, not linear, and variably difficult, humbling, connecting, and powerful. It wasn't until this project, however, that I learned these lessons more deeply. In the text that follows, an upper-year undergraduate student, Ronak Rai, and I explore the

lessons of relationality and traditional teachings learned while undertaking a research project on urban berry foraging; the ethics and uncertainties of non-Indigenous settlers undertaking this work; and the promises of this work for all treaty people.<sup>2</sup> Our hope is that this reflexive piece will support others grappling with the weighty, complex, and pressing questions of how, if, when, where, and with whom to undertake anti-colonial research in the academy and from within food studies.

Faculty intro: As a critical food studies scholar interested in de-centring western, nutri-centric frameworks of healthy eating, I was initially drawn to Indigenous understandings of food while working on a book that sought to complicate singular food truths common to western food discourses (Overend, 2021). Food from within a dominant western paradigm is often overly and overtly nutrient- and calorically oriented, but from within Indigenous worldviews, food is holistically and deeply tied to land, ancestors, community, spirit, and non-human animals (Kimmerer, 2013; LaDuke, 2012; Martin & Mathews, 2021). In my own thinking, I saw many of these interdependent, collective, and holistic teachings as welcome, necessary antidotes to the ever-creeping logics of neoliberal capitalism that demand disconnections from the land, from history, from

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<sup>1</sup> For Carlson (2016), terms like postcolonialism and decolonization facilitate the framing of colonialism as being something of the past, whereas anti-colonialism, in contrast, is "rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, interpreting the experiences of colonized peoples on their own terms, and evoking intellectual understandings not forced through Eurocentric lenses" (p. 5).

<sup>2</sup> One of the lessons I have learned from Elders and Indigenous teachings is that we are all treaty people, we are all connected to the land, and to each other. As such, the health of the land and food insecurity affect us all, though due to the ongoing effects of colonization, Indigenous peoples are often affected more acutely.

knowledge, and from one another, which, I think, is what ultimately led me to this project. Compelled to learn more about food from Indigenous worldviews and motivated by the social and political possibilities of these teachings, I reached out to the Director at my home institution's Indigenous Learning Centre about collaborating on a research project.<sup>3</sup> In our initial conversation, we talked about Indigenous food insecurity and food sovereignty efforts, urban food solutions (especially amidst the food shortages and food inflation seen during the COVID-19 pandemic), and the need for a deepening of land-based food knowledge in cities for Indigenous and settler groups alike. With her guidance, we eventually landed on the importance of berries and their place in Amiskwacîwâskahikan, the Cree name for Beaver Hills House, colonially known as Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.

Student intro: My name is Ronak Rai and I was born in Kashmir, India. I immigrated to Canada with my parents and older brother in 2000. My family's decision to leave Kashmir was driven by the desire to provide my brother and I opportunities outside the impacts of occupation and neo-colonialism. Although I was too young at the time to recall the day-to-day challenges of living in the aftermath of British colonialism and Indian imperialism in Kashmir, my undergraduate education and my participation in this research has deepened the social, historical, and political contexts of those experiences. I gained a better intellectual understanding of the similar and divergent histories I share with Indigenous peoples in Canada. As a settler in this country, I also acquired a stronger political determination to use my education to bolster Indigenous sovereignty efforts. Having taken two prior courses with

Dr. Overend, I initially reached out in the hope of undertaking an independent study broadly related to food and health. It was then that I learned about the urban foraging project and its ties to Indigenous knowledge systems. I didn't know exactly what the project would entail or what I'd learn in the process. As a psychology honours student with a minor in sociology, I had solid research experience at the undergraduate level. While these research experiences afforded me valuable (conventional) academic knowledge and skills, my participation in the urban foraging project was impactful in ways I didn't anticipate. It opened the ability to connect with the research process in personal and politicized ways, which I hadn't yet experienced.

Eventually, and with the guidance of our Indigenous Learning Centre's knowledge keeper, we applied for and were awarded a small grant to look at berry foraging in our city's extensive river valley, which grows a range of edible berries, nuts, and roots. The grant money was used to: 1) organize a sweat ceremony with a local Elder to honour the project, and receive guidance about berries; 2) interview four to five local Elders and knowledge keepers about their stories and teachings on berries; 3) photograph and map berry sources in the city's river valley system; and 4) organize two community events on urban berry foraging. The aim was to pair the "what" and "where" of berries in our city with traditional Cree and other local Indigenous teachings, in part to encourage reflection of the edible food sources in urban environments and in part to centralize the more holistic and relational aspects of food, common to Indigenous worldviews.

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<sup>3</sup> The Director was also invited to contribute to this write-up, but due to workload demands on her end was not able to participate—a reminder of the often-taxing demands placed on Indigenous colleagues' time and expertise. The Director did indicate her enthusiasm and support for the piece and her contributions to the project are noted throughout.

## Settler research uncertainties

As a settler doing this work, I felt honoured to be part of it and excited about the possibilities of the research, but I also felt uncertain about my own place within the work. Was this my work to do? Would I inadvertently carry western settler logics and norms into the work? Was I doing this for my own gain, or for something broader? Would I do justice to the knowledge that felt both ancient and sacred? I didn't initially voice these concerns for reasons I am not entirely sure about. Perhaps if I voiced them, they would become real? Perhaps they would fade as the research progressed? Perhaps I had internalized western, colonial, masculinist norms that dictated that I had to uphold a kind of mastery and authority about my role in the project? Regardless of why these uncertainties emerged, and/or why they initially went unaddressed, I came to realize that these questions were in fact central to the research project. Much like a shadow syllabus—a helpful and enduring concept coined by Sonya Huber (2014) to articulate the unspoken, just-below-the-surface contexts of classroom learning—I was learning to listen and respect the deeper research questions emerging.

Despite extensive literature reviews, good intentions, carefully mapped research designs, research ethics board<sup>4</sup> approvals, and well-thought-out interview questions, my uncertainties were *rightly* asking me to deeply reflect on the project and my place as a settler within it. Western academic has a long, nefarious history “in which research has perpetuated and been complicit in violence against Indigenous groups” (Lira et al., 2019, pp. 475-476). It has done so through othering and stealing the knowledges of Indigenous

peoples, often for the gain and benefit of non-Indigenous peoples and groups. In their work on refusing dominant, colonial power relations in research methodologies, Tuck and Yang (2014) importantly ask: “how do we learn from and respect the wisdom [of the research] stories we hear while refusing to portray/betray them to the spectacle of the settler colonial gaze” (p. 2)? This is a key question for anyone aiming to unsettle and undo colonial (and other dominant) power relations in their work and one we took seriously in this write-up.

To disrupt and work against colonial research dynamics, Tuck and Yang (2014) rely on three axioms. The first is to ensure that the subaltern is not speaking about their pain or trauma, which positions the marginalized or oppressed person/group as powerless to make their own change, while rendering the researcher (even if unintentional) as both saviour and change-maker. The second is to honour that there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn't deserve—knowledge that is better shared in community and through ceremony. And the third axiom is to question whether research is the best invention over other forms of problem solving and knowledge dissemination. These axioms will be discussed in relation to urban berry foraging, alongside wider Indigenous frameworks of relationality. Relationality is a concept, practice, and way of being that maintains deep, reciprocal relationships to place and to each other (Smith, 2021). Relationality connects people, stories, and ideas to the land, to kin, to ancestors, and to community, and it is a slow, embodied form of learning (Tynan, 2021). While

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<sup>4</sup> While university research ethics boards have attempted to support Indigenous protocols and ways of knowing in applications that work with or alongside Indigenous populations, ultimately these considerations on their own are insufficient. As this piece explores, settlers researching with Indigenous populations need to reflect far beyond any kind of rote checklist when undertaking this work.

I have been exposed to the concept of relationality multiple times prior, it wasn't until we embarked on

this research journey that the deeper teachings of relationality became learned.

## Learning and un-learning about berries

With the start of spring, our project was also under way. It began with an independent study course I ran with Ronak where we studied Indigenous food insecurity and sovereignty efforts as well as the importance and role of berries to various local Indigenous communities. The course readings were Indigenous-centred and did not focus on stories of pain, but instead on deep knowledge of food and food sources. In early May of 2022, the Director of our campus's Indigenous Learning Centre organized a sweat ceremony with a local Elder to bless our project and receive guidance on berries and their roles in medicine and in ceremony. Later in May, I was invited to attend a Cree culture camp. I was emailed a schedule and told it would be a good place to make connections for possible interviews. Without knowing otherwise, I attended the culture camp much like I would an academic conference. I showed up with a notebook, a pen, and a printout of

the schedule. But, upon arrival, the traditional grounds where the camp was held felt nothing like an academic conference. The teachings all took place in teepee sharing circles and/or on the land/in the bush. I also came to realize that despite the intended schedule, the order of programming had a different pace and logic. Talks, activities, and events began when the speaker or facilitator arrived and ended when the conversation had run its course. Naïvely, I had booked other meetings and commitments in the city that I was trying to balance with the culture camp, without realizing that a big part of the learning of the camp was the immersive experience of it all—being on the land, in community, and in conversation, without external time constraints. It was the relational aspects of the camp that were the foundations of learning, not necessarily the content of each activity. It took me a while to understand this teaching.

Image 1: Deer hide rattle (author's image)



After the four-day camp, I found myself focussing on the lack of interview participants we had lined up, rather than what felt at the time like “secondary” teachings, including making a deer hide rattle (photo above), attending sharing circles, and participating in a guided nature walk. While each of these experiences were thought provoking, informative, and humbling in ways I couldn’t yet quite articulate, I didn’t initially understand their connection to berry foraging until much later in the year. At the time, I was overly focussed on the tangible outcomes of the research and anxious that we hadn’t made any formal connections on the interview portion of it. We only had the summer months to try and collect a handful of interviews and we were already one month in without any. I felt responsible to the Indigenous Learning Centre I was working with, the student I had brought on board, and the funding group to keep this project on track. After the camp, I doubled down my efforts to try and recruit participants. I reached out to people I had been introduced to by the knowledge keeper and names I’d been given from the Indigenous Learning Centre. Despite my efforts, I found that prospective interviewees either weren’t available or weren’t responsive. At the time, I wasn’t sure if their lack of availability and responsiveness had to do with the broader social and political commitments of Indigenous peoples, especially throughout the summer months, or with my role as a settler doing this work. June is National Indigenous History Month, culminating with summer solstice celebrations. July was centered around the emotionally laden and politically charged visit from Pope Francis to Alberta to apologize for the atrocities and legacies of the residential School system.

Additionally, the summer we were running the project coincided with the first summer of official (even if pre-emptive) reopening after the previous two lockdown summers and many of the people we were

hoping to interview were on the land and back in community. Come August and September, planning was underway for the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. After two funding extensions and a continued dearth of interview participants my initial doubts about my place in the project were growing. Was I participating in insidious forms of Indigenous extractivism (Shotwell, 2022)? Was my role as an academic and my embeddedness in an academic institution and research funding infrastructures impeding the process? Perhaps some (or many) of the traditional teachings on berries were lost or forgotten? Or maybe they were being shared in Indigenous-only spaces and places? I wrestled with these types of questions throughout the next phases of the project, without any definitive answers. I thought about reaching out for guidance, but Terri was on an administrative leave and Cynthia, the knowledge keeper we were working with, was travelling. While my doubts about my place as a settler academic on the one hand were growing, I was buoyed, even guided by the promises of this work and the lessons therein on the other hand, and increasingly unsure how, or even if it was possible, to reconcile these conflicting aspects of the work.

The initial impetus that there were worthwhile lessons in this project I do not believe was misguided. But, as per Tuck and Yang’s (2014) second decolonizing axiom, I was reminded that there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn’t deserve. In contrast to uncertainties posed by the formal research aspects of the project, the two community urban foraging events we organized felt notably different. The knowledge keeper, student, and I, along with other local berry foragers put on two free community events—one at an inner-city, arts-based, grassroots, Indigenous-focussed venue and the other at an environmental education community centre that

forefronts local Indigenous teachings and initiatives. In exchange for tobacco and broad cloth, the knowledge keeper opened both events with drumming, song, and prayer and offered traditional teachings about berries. She also shared with great pride a new song her daughters had made about berries for our project. At each event, we offered attendees foraged saskatoon berries, goji berries,<sup>5</sup> raspberry leaf tea, as we discussed our various projects and interests. The energy at these events was palpable and brimming with excitement, curiosity, mutual respect, and care—for berries, foraging, and one another. For me, these events were also transformative in my own thinking about the project. With only one research interview to share, my own experiences of berry picking, and the lessons of relationality therein, came into greater focus.

It was through these reflections I realized that I had gotten at least one part of the initial research design quite wrong: the berries weren't our objects of study, they were our teachers. From within western ontologies, berries are inanimate objects, studied from scientific and anthropocentric knowledge frames. From within Indigenous worldview, berries are both animate and kin. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), who describes herself as a mother, scientist, professor, and member of the Potawatomi Nation, reflects on her experiences "from a childhood in the woods to the university" (p. 41) and the shifting worldviews therein. She notes that "the questions scientists raised [about plants] were not 'Who are you?' but 'What is it?' No one asked plants 'what can you tell us?' ... The botany I was taught was reductionistic, mechanistic, and strictly objective. Plants were reduced to objects; they were not subjects" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 42). Having been raised in a western school system and without knowing otherwise, I too inadvertently held the same western beliefs about

plants. Slowly, through the Indigenous teachings I was being exposed to, and through the relational and reciprocal practices of foraging, my thinking about (or rather with?) berries changed. I wasn't in fact studying berries. I was learning about relational ways of being through the teachings of berries.

By mid-summer, as the saskatoon berries were ripening from a bluey-purple to a blue-black, I ventured into the river valley with the photographer and digital mapper. As a newbie forager, I wasn't sure what to expect. Would I find (or be shown) any berries? Would they be ready to harvest? Would I be able to properly identify them? Would I offer protocol in the correct way? Despite these questions, and the time needed to drive, then hike, to the areas where the berries grew, and the time and care needed to pick and forage, I found the overall experience to be quite joyful and fulfilling. Following the guidance I'd received from the knowledge keeper we were working with, as well as other local Cree teachings on foraging, I offered protocol to the land; asked the berries if they wished to be picked and "listened" for the answer; took no more than what I needed; shared the harvest with Elders and other community members; and left some for others, including the winged and rooted ones, which perpetuated the cycle of reciprocity. Relationality and plant sentience are recurring themes in Cree ontologies and epistemologies of berries. As Cree scholar Janelle Marie Baker (2021) notes, "berry plants decide whether or not to produce fruit, and whether or not an individual will encounter...them in the forest" (p. 281).

Baker also explains that entire berry patches will relocate if they are not properly cared for, a reminder of

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<sup>5</sup> Yong Fei Guan (2023) researches heritage goji berry plants and their cultural Chinese history in Edmonton.

our responsibilities to the land and everything around us. That berries are agentic and relational is a profound

antidote to the western object-centred discourses of food.

Image 2: Alissa in forest



Image 3: Alissa foraging

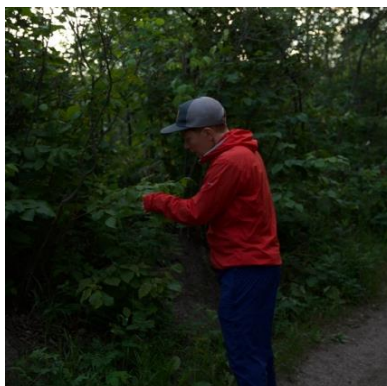


Image 4: Saskatoon berries on bush



During the two-to-three-hour foraging outings, I felt a genuine sense of presence and humility to place and to the land. Herman Michell (2009), a Professor of Education who is of Woodland Cree heritage, writes that berry picking is more than just sustenance, it is a

way of life: “I was a part of the land, and the land was a part of me” (as cited in Baker, 2021, p. 283). Similarly, Poe et al. (2014) describe a deep sense of connection, or what they call “the relational ecologies of belonging” when urban foraging (p. 901). I too felt a



deep sense of connection upon being shown and being invited to pick saskatoon berries in a city I'd lived for nearly twenty years and on trails I'd walked and biked many times before. While the berries had always been in the city, it was my thinking, seeing, and listening that had shifted. The sense of relation to the more-than-human geographies that surrounded me was a welcome change from the transactional exchanges of western, globalized, colonial, and capitalist food systems. Our foraging outings never yielded large quantities of berries, but the modest hauls felt precious, even sacred, because of the care that went into getting them but also because of my changed thinking about them. Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) writes that strawberries are “gifts from the earth [that] establish a relationship to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. A gift creates an ongoing relationship” (p. 27). I felt connected to the land and to

the people around me differently and more profoundly than I had experienced prior. It was here that I realized that the rattle-making, teepee teachings, and nature walks of the culture camp were foundational to berry foraging because they centralized everything around us and our relation to it. I was also coming to realize that the knowledge I initially set out to look for in the study was much different than anticipated. The teachings were not out in the world waiting to be discovered, but rather a learning journey within my own thinking and doing. The knowledge I was initially searching for was far less visible than the traditional, western (tangible) markers of research success. In short, I had to embody the teachings, not just study them—a lesson that Karen Pheasant-Neganigwane helped me realize through her teachings in the one interview we were able to conduct.

Image 5: Karen sharing knowledge



Image 6: Strawberry quillwork



Karen Pheasant-Neganigwane is a Nishanaabeg educator, author, dancer, and quill worker who grew up on the land of the Manitoulin in Ontario, but who has lived and worked in Amiskwacîwâskahikan since the 1980s. For Pheasant-Neganigwane, the land is essential to learning. She notes, “as a professor, an educator, and a teacher, I tell my students their greatest education is to be on the land, to camp, to look around, to find out what’s in it.” Having just returned from a trip home, she spoke about her fondest childhood memories of strawberry (Ode’min, meaning heart-berry) picking with her family and community, and noting that these were community, month-long undertakings, usually in June. Importantly for Pheasant-Neganigwane, “berry picking is not individualistic. It’s a family, a collective, and a communal undertaking.” She recalls month-long campouts during strawberry season where there would be song, ceremony, and intergenerational teachings. Much like the immersive lessons of the Cree culture camp, where learning took place *with* the land, she notes that “you can’t harvest without being on the land...sleeping on the ground, breathing in that morning dew.” In reminiscing about these childhood experiences, she wondered if the Euro-western concept of a “picnic” (eating outside with loved ones) stemmed from Indigenous berry *picking* and foraging practices. In addition to memories and practices of berry picking,

she shared quill work she’d done featuring strawberries and talked about traditional dyes from the berries that were used to colour baskets, jewelry, and other items. Her teachings wove together the relational and reciprocal aspects of foraging. Jokingly, yet poignantly, Pheasant-Neganigwane notes that “Dairy Queen teaches us that strawberries are just a topping on an ice cream cone, [but] they are so much more than that. Berries are a sacred food.” In reflecting on the importance of these teachings, she emphasizes, “we always value the seen, but we need to value the unseen. When I say I lived my life, the essence of it, and I never forget the unseen. It’s included everything.”

We closed the project in and around winter solstice, about ten months from when we began. The funders had a hard deadline of the end of the (western) calendar year and despite continued attempts, we still couldn’t recruit any additional interviewees. I had come to a place in my own thinking that the project (in its current iteration) had run its course. The community events had sparked enthusiasm and good, thoughtful, and careful conversations about Indigenous teachings and urban foraging. Ronak and I had gained some hard-earned lessons in Indigenous worldview and relational research practices. I had also accepted that we weren’t going to complete the interview portion of the research. I had ongoing frustrations about doing this type of work amidst fixed timelines and wondered if our

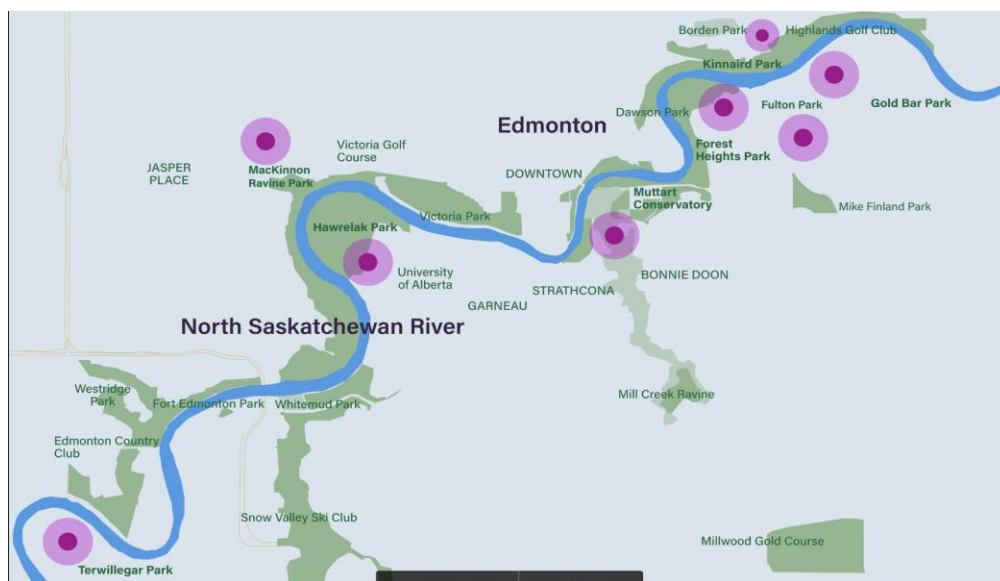
project would have had different outcomes if there were more fluid (or no) timelines for the slowness of the work to unfold and more time to develop deeper connections in and with community. Much like the unexpected joys of being shown forgeable food in nature, or the gift of traditional teachings from an Elder or knowledge keeper, these teachings were inherently

unpredictable (as the culture camp had taught me) and necessarily slow (as berry foraging had taught me). And while I had unresolved ambiguities about settlers doing this work (even if collaborative), I held on to the transformational potential of this work for critical food studies and for students.

Image 7: Saskatoon berry close-up



Image 8: Map of river valley with berry locations



## Student reflections

From the sweat lodge ceremony to berry picking in the river valley, to the more personalized academic texts I was reading, the project taught me that there are different ways to learn about and make sense of the world. When I was completing a literature review on Indigenous food insecurity and Indigenous Food Sovereignty, I was surprised to see the widespread use of personal photos, stories, and histories in the scholarly work of the Indigenous authors and academics I was studying. Reading such accounts contradicted what I had been taught in a Western academic setting and in most of my undergraduate studies—that research was

to be conveyed as “objectively” as possible. In much of what I read in my undergraduate education, there seemed to be little to no space for personal interpretation or experience. However, while reading the work of Indigenous academics and authors for the urban foraging project, I noticed a sense of connection, relationality, and vulnerability that I hadn’t read in academic work prior. The personal expressions of thoughts, experiences, and observations were incredibly engaging, especially in comparison to the more distanced and formal academic writing I was used to.

**Image 9:** Community learning in river valley



Image 10: Cynthia singing with drum



The other significant difference I noticed in this independent study compared to my other undergraduate courses was the space and place of learning. Rather than being in a classroom, this project allowed me to learn in relation to the community and to the land. By participating in Indigenous ceremony, berry picking, and community events, my family, friends, community, and learning were intertwined, and not separate from one another. These community-based learning experiences were both grounding and eye-opening in ways I hadn't expected. The exposure to Indigenous worldviews and concepts, including reciprocity, environmental stewardship, collaboration, and connection with the land and one another, reconnected me with core Indian or collectivist values I had strayed from. These relational learning experiences helped reconcile parts of myself that were lost in trying to understand where to go and what to do with my life (quintessential questions for a student graduating from university). Ultimately, they guided me towards the

anti-colonial counselling work I plan to pursue post-graduation.

It was the culmination of my own experiences as an immigrant settler, combined with the deep, relational learning acquired from the berry foraging project that led to my growing interests in Indigenous history in Canada, Indigenous worldviews, and contemporary challenges faced by Indigenous peoples. These interests will play a pivotal role in my upcoming master's program in Counselling Psychology. My hope is to meaningfully contribute to Indigenous-led initiatives that aim to decolonize the field of psychology to better serve Indigenous clients seeking mental health care. More specifically, I plan to explore ways in which counselling can centre trauma- and culturally informed practices. Such practices legitimize Indigenous knowledge systems of health and healing instead of acting as a form of continued oppression and colonization through adherence to western ideologies (Fellner et al., 2020; Stewart et al., 2017).

As a person of colour, the academic work I do is not separate from my lived experiences, but rather informed by them. Continuing to learn about my own nation's history of colonialism and occupation allows me to observe important intersections between my own community and that of the ongoing colonial systems still negatively impacting Indigenous peoples in Canada today. As a non-Indigenous settler, I recognize that at a personal and professional level, my work carries significant responsibilities. Foremost among these is an acknowledgement of my privilege in benefiting from the current Canadian system (e.g., a safe upbringing, education, and other services and support) at the expense of Indigenous sovereignty through colonization. Another critical responsibility is engaging in continuous education about the ongoing impacts of colonialism. This means understanding the historical context of the land where I reside, and learning what it truly means to be trauma- and culturally informed in the context of Indigenous experiences. This extends to my responsibility to ensure active collaboration and ensuring that my work is centred on being informed by Indigenous voices, including planning, and

participating in community-based research, and utilizing anti-colonial research methodologies.

While my pathway to Indigenous worldviews came through urban foraging and food studies, the lessons learned on land- and community-based teachings will follow me into the next phases of my learning journeys. I came into the berries project with the initial goal of broadening my research scope and I could not have anticipated the profound impact it would have. This journey, while rooted in academia, has significantly shaped my worldviews, my place in those worldviews, and my professional aspirations as a result. I have developed a deeper connection to the work and find myself professionally and politically committed to working against the ongoing violences perpetuated on Indigenous clients through mainstream counselling practices that centre western ways of knowing and doing. At this point, I don't know what I will learn in the next few years of my program, but I aim to utilize my learning, teachings, skills, privileges, and relative power to contribute relationally and anti-colonially to long-term changes that prioritize Indigenous healing and healing methods, including those, like berry foraging, that connect to the land and to community.

Image 11: Group shot at community event



Image 12: Ronak presenting



## Ongoing relationalities

As universities (and the people in them) grapple (often clumsily, even if in earnest) with de- and anti-colonial efforts, we must be careful to work against what Dennis Foley (2018) aptly characterizes as the McDonaldization of Indigenous methodologies in the academy. Universities have long and enduring histories of Indigenous extractivism, where deep, holistic, and complex concepts and practices are standardized, oversimplified, and made to “fit” within settler-colonial and capitalist paradigms or are used for academic gain without attention to mutuality. Leanne Betasmosake Simpson (2013), a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist, emphasizes that the alternative to colonial extractivism “is deep reciprocity. It’s respect, its relationship, its responsibility, and it’s local” (as cited in Tynan, 2021, p. 604). Amidst the growing privatization and neoliberalization of postsecondary institutions (and food cultures), the lessons of relationality learned through foraging and Indigenous worldview are necessary antidotes to the speed, efficiency, individualism, and economic gains that are typically centralized over slow, thoughtful, communal, and relational values of research (and food procurement).

The lessons of relationality learned through urban foraging have asked the student and me to embody reciprocity by considering our place in the settler systems and structures that surround us, our connectedness to the earth and to the land on which we live, and the responsibilities we bear to our human and more-than-human communities. These teachings have asked us to reflect how—and to what depths and ends—we carry and embody these lessons. For the student, this entails graduate work that deepens her understanding and practice of anti-colonial research methodologies that work with and centre Indigenous voices, experiences, and worldviews. For me, this entails a continued attunement the less visible, just-below-the-surface aspects of research and teaching; ongoing collaborations with the Indigenous Learning Centre, including the possible creation a digital story about berries and urban foraging in our city; alongside a continued commitment to work against the colonial systems and structures that endure, in ourselves and in the world.

Universities and academic disciplines, including critical food studies, have much work to do to undo the

settler-colonial practices, methodologies, ontologies, and epistemologies that are foundational to western academia. For those of us in universities, we are likely quite far from research that exists without financial imperatives, strict deadlines, or quantified metrics, but that doesn't mean there aren't also lessons and joys to be gained in trying and/or creative solutions to be exercised in maneuvering some of the institutional limits placed upon us. Perhaps this is exactly the type of de- and anti-colonial work we are being called to do? While I agree with Tuck and Yang's (2014) assertion that there are some forms of knowledge that the academy doesn't deserve, I also want to imagine, work towards, and participate in a version of the academy that does. Following Elizabeth Carlson's (2016)

speculation, I want to "imagine how much academia itself might change, as well as the experiences of Indigenous scholars within it, if large numbers of settler scholars were to re-orient in these [anti-colonial] ways" (p. 17)? And for the critical food studies scholars, I want to ask in earnest and amidst the growing perils of a globalized food system, "how in our modern world can we find our way to understand the earth as a gift, [and] to make our relations with the world [and food] sacred again" (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 31)? The lessons of mindfulness, care, kinship, gratitude, humility, and being in relation learned from berries but applicable far beyond them, are very much all our collective work to do.

## Questions for takeaway reflection

To work against the colonial, extractivist norms so deeply imbued in western academia, the Director of the Indigenous Learning Centre we worked with suggested we offer a handful of reflexive questions for settlers undertaking this type of work. These questions are not intended as a simple checklist or a how-to map or manual for decolonizing research. Instead, they offer entry points for your own journeys of un-learning and re-learning. May they surprise and guide you.

1. How does your methodology and/or research seek to equalize (dominant) power relations within food studies, embrace humility, attend to a subjectivity and emotion, promote the participation of self-determination of participants and communities in food procurement, engage accountable food relationships, share control and ownership, and collaboratively contribute to food security and

- sovereignty efforts (adapted from Carlson, 2016)?

2. How might learning about food and foraging be different on the land and in community as opposed to in a classroom? What is gained when we move the place of learning outside the academy? What, if anything, is lost?

3. When is the best time to reflect on your place as a settler academic doing critical food studies work? What might be gained by doing these reflections prior to the official start of the research process (adapted from Lira et al., 2019)?

4. Does academia deserve Indigenous stories and teachings about food? In what contexts would they deserve them and in what contexts would they not (adapted from Tuck & Yang, 2014)?



5. Is research the best intervention for the food problem or issue being studied? What other forms of knowledge generation and/or

dissemination might be effective or useful and why (adapted from Tuck & Yang, 2014)?

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