Decolonising the Body: Restoring Sacred Vitality

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of the impacts of sexual, racial and colonial violence on Native women requires unlearning ways of thinking and being that have been etched onto the body. This article examines a program developed for urban Native women that focuses on restoring the felt sense of sacred interconnection with relations and developing an embodied spiritual practice incorporating traditional teachings.

RÉSUMÉ

La transformation des impacts de la violence sexuelle raciale et coloniale contre les femmes autochtones demande un désapprentissage des façons de penser et d'être qui ont été ancrées dans le corps. Cet article étudie un programme élaboré pour les femmes autochtones urbaines qui se concentre à restaurer le sentiment de l'interconnection sacrée entre les relations et le développement d'une pratique sprirituelle qui incorpore les enseignements traditionnels.

INTRODUCTION

In writing this article we acknowledge our place in Creation, the Ancestors who have gone before, and the teachings they left with us for the benefit of the future generations. We acknowledge the sacred gifts of the earth, the air, the fire and water that give life and sustain us. We acknowledge the minerals, plants, animals and the humans as our relatives. We acknowledge the traditional ancestral territories in which we visit, work, and live. We honour where our original ancestors' lineages come from, and the gifts they offer in our lives as they continue to direct our intention to reflect our spiritual teachings in practice.

We write from our respective traditions. Alannah is Anishnabe and Cree from the Opaswayak Cree Nation, presently living in traditional Coast Salish Territory and working at the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia. She has worked with teachers from several Indigenous nations and this has shaped her Indigenous spiritual practice. Her work intersects transformative Indigenous leadership praxis, critical race theory and is informed by Indigenous theory that supports self-determined, decolonizing agendas. Denise is a European Canadian of French and Irish heritage, raised in Quebec. Her French ancestors intermarried with Mi'kmaq women and occupied Mi'kmaq territory on the Gaspé peninsula. Her religious worldview and spirituality have been shaped by ecofeminist and post-colonial theology, critical race theory, anti-racist feminism and the Catholic Worker movement, as well as many years of working in the area of violence against women in both Native and non-Native communities in British Columbia and Montreal.

This article describes a program we developed for women who have suffered ongoing sexual, racist and colonial violence in their lives. This approach to regeneration and healing from violence centres on the body and is primarily a form of Indigenous knowledge education. In doing this, we connect with Indigenous cultural resiliency theory of people like Iris HeavyRunner and Rick Smith, who demonstrate how the ability "to survive and even thrive in the face of adversity" has been linked with tapping into our own natural spiritual resilience (HeavyRunner & Morris 1997; Smith 1999). Cultural identity is a primary source of strength and spirituality is a core aspect that contributes to this cultural resilience. The transmitting of cultural values and teachings helps us to engage with unlocking our human potential and mediate multiple forms of oppression in "new" ways. Our focus is on balancing spiritual and body wisdom as a way of reconciling relationships affected by violence. Our emphasis is on lifting up people's unique gifts and goodness. We don't have

big dreams of "fixing" people, but rather we want to share what has helped us and the women with whom we have worked.

Between 2001 and 2003 we ran a program called Restoring Sacred Vitality with Native women in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. The Downtown Eastside (DES) has the lowest per capita income of all postal codes in Canada, the highest HIV infection rate and is the area where sixty-six "missing women" have been murdered or abducted in the last ten years. Over half of these women are aboriginal. While the media sensationalizes this area as a hotbed of sex, drugs, addiction and crime, most women live out daily lives of mundane and soul-destroying poverty, living with the impacts of the intersection of intimate violence with the routine daily violence of colonialism and gendered racism. Invisible to outside eyes is the fact that many of these women are both resisting the conditions in which they live and struggling to build community and foster visions of change.

Our program was initially sponsored by the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre and later by Breaking the Silence - a community coalition of women organizing against violence in the DES. The overall goal of our program was to support Native women's leadership development through affirming strengths and restoring connection. Designed as a twelve-session program of two and a half hours per session, we repeated it three times. We then offered training for those who wanted to adapt the program in their own work. While we experimented with one drop-in "open" program, our main focus was on women who had made a commitment to their own healing and were willing to attend all sessions. Several of these women took more than one course.

Because the women in our groups had experienced many levels of violence, our priority was to support the repair of the disconnection of the body-spirit caused by multiple violations. More specifically, we explored how to recover the body-spirit's relationship with self, land, and community - to restore the sense of sacred interconnection undermined by violence. This means restoring relationships to earth as teacher and to one's place within the framework of relatives and natural teachers.

Our approach involves a focus on both the individual and the collective, i.e., on the self in community. We dance, sing, draw and create as a group. This process involves reclaiming the sacredness of the body, lamenting collective losses and celebrating collective gifts and strengths. It combines spiritual teachings, somatic education, movement, dance and performance as well as spiritual practices for daily use.

The word "somatic" comes from the Greek word "soma" - the living body. The body is inseparable from our feelings about ourselves and our experiences of others. Somatic education provides skills that focus on the physical body to address emotional and mental stress and to reconnect with spirit. We use drumming, singing and dancing as traditional forms of somatic education, i.e., traditional forms of engaging the body-spirit as one. As in most Native American philosophies, we do not separate the spiritual and physical dimensions of being.

The term "sacred vitality" refers to the feeling of energetic connection with one's own sacredness, with the earth and with others in community, a feeling of being fully alive. This aliveness allows one to "stand one's ground" in experiencing one's rootedness in a web of relations. Sacred vitality supports transformation, affirms collective strength and sacredness in the face of oppression, and creates new forms of power and non-violent embodied ways of being in this world.

In this article we suggest that the process of restoring sacred vitality is a form of decolonization. We first briefly analyze how mainstream healing programs directed at aboriginal women often function to maintain a colonial agenda. We then describe what we do, give some examples of how we do it and some of the major issues we face in this work. We conclude with some reflections on the meaning of decolonization as applied to Native women living in the context of inner cities.

HEALING INITIATIVES AND THE POLITICS OF TRAUMA

Many healing initiatives that address the "problems" of Native peoples, especially in inner city areas, fail to link individual suffering to the broader psychosocial conditions in which most live. Pastoral counseling, social work and therapy approaches focus on the negative aspects of people's behavior and pathologize the impacts of violence. In

doing this they operate as a form of "welfare colonialism," with the assumption that these "populations" need to be managed or changed and require help and guidance. This "non-demonstrative colonialism" is still part of the relationship between Native peoples and the Canadian State, a form of "coercive tutelage" which veils the outright land grabs and assimilation policies of earlier forms of colonialism (Dyck 1991; Paine 1977).

A significant example of these ongoing colonial dynamics is found in the language of trauma applied to Native communities. The extensive class, race, gender and colonial violence that many Native women have experienced is lost in the diagnostic terminology of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a label found in the American Psychiatric Society's Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) and applied to a wide range of physical and emotional symptoms. PTSD, like much trauma language, reduces suffering to a condition of medical pathology rather than a spiritual or moral problem caused by political violence. This "social suffering" - a term from medical anthropology - is transformed into individual cases of dysfunction. The language of deficiency and dysfunction reduces to personality traits or syndromes the behaviours that have emerged as survival or resistance responses to oppressive conditions.

Rather than address the causes of the poverty and distress that have led to the dislocation and disintegration of communities, the trauma industry manages disruptive behavior with medication or criminalization. As well, the extensive use of "talk therapies" does not deal with the profound damage done to Native women's body-spirits. The various treatment programs, shelters, social service agencies, and counseling services that operate in inner cities thus serve to reinforce a sense of powerlessness and undermine women's ability to resist. It is these underlying dynamics that explain why so often therapy programs don't "work" for Native women.

REFRAMING TRAUMA AND RECOVERY

We use the term "psychosocial trauma" to describe the effects of routinized violence that aboriginal women experience. Rather than focusing on the individual, this concept of trauma gives primacy to the social network in which the human is embedded (Martin-Baro 1994). Psychosocial trauma is trauma that is foreseeable and predictable; it affects an entire network of social relations. As long as dehumanizing social relations continue, the symptoms of trauma remain both in individuals and in communities. It is only in changing the social relations between colonizer and colonized that psychosocial trauma can be alleviated.

In Native communities another level of relationship has been damaged. Indigenous philosophies are based in cosmologies of relationships that include the interrelatedness of plants, animals, minerals and humans. Multiple forms of colonial violence over generations have resulted in a spiritual disjuncture - a loss of connection with these relations. Ronald Niezen, in *Spirit Wars*, describes this as a "radical instability in the human relationship with the spirit world" (Niezen 2000, 35). The many aspects of colonialism that attacked religious identity, many of which continue today in different forms, also eroded communities' sense of their spiritual identity. For many, this spiritual dispossession was and is experienced in loss of awareness of connection to both those in their community, and to the land.

For Native women this historical spiritual disjuncture operates at two additional levels. While previously "our cultures promoted womanhood as a sacred identity, an identity that existed within a complex system of relations of societies that were based on balance," now, through the process of a sexist and racist colonialism, Native women have lost their collective status as sacred (Anderson 2000, 57). At the individual level, when neither a woman's traditions nor her body is respected, this is played out in a loss of her sense of honour, lived out in her body. She feels devitalized, dis-spirited; her body-spirit has lost touch with its connection to its relations.

The program Restoring Sacred Vitality addresses this loss of connection with relations. It is based on a cosmology that sees all relations as sacred, as imbued with Spirit. The body is sacred and connected to land and all living beings, and it is capable of self-determining and self-regulating; in other words the body is able to adapt, change, be repaired and restored in relation to other organisms.

This connected and becoming body is infused with sacred vitality, the flowing of energy

between sacred beings and the Creator. When this flowing of energy is interrupted by violence, then the task of repair involves restoring these connections in the body and repairing the network of relations. While social and economic justice is absolutely necessary to restore the web of relations shattered by political violence and oppression, there is an equally urgent need to recover the individual's and the collective's sense of dignity and honour so that this struggle for justice can take on a form that honours traditional teachings.

RESTORING SACRED VITALITY: THE PROGRAM

One of the two spiritual principles underlying Restoring Sacred Vitality is non-violence. This is expressed in the practice of non-judgement and compassion for one's self and for others. It is lived out in an attitude of kindness towards oneself - there is nothing to fix, one just allows one's body-spirit to do what it needs to do at any particular moment.

Some examples of how we teach non-judgement and compassion are:

We begin each session, after a song, with a time of meditating on the breath as the Spirit within us and saying a short prayer that acknowledges our goodness.

We include the practice of compassion for self in many activities:

- guided visualizations that involve sending compassion and acceptance to specific parts of the body that have done so much for us over the years;
- the practice of gentle self-touch; and
- sending the energy of compassion to parts of the body that hold emotional or physical pain.

The second principle is "the Good Life Way" and the consciousness of reciprocal relational responsibilities that is central to this principle. Each Native culture has its own version of the Good Life Way: The Good Life Path or *Bimaadziwin* in Anishnabe; *Miyowicehtowin* - having good relations - for the Cree of the Northern prairies; *Sken-nen kowa* - maintaining peace between peoples - for the Iroquois; *Hozho*, Navajo for walking in beauty, walking in a sacred manner, walking with a peaceful heart. Common to these different versions of the Good Life Way are the lived values of relations, beauty and balance.

We reinforce the principles of beauty, relations and balance through:

- the structure of the program, which, through its ceremonies and activities, follows the principle of balance by addressing the four parts of the self - the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional dimensions;
- during each program we include a retreat day outside the inner city in which all participants have time to develop their sensory relationship with the land;
- all the rituals, ceremonies, teachings and prayers expand awareness of and make connections with all relations, reinforcing principles of beauty and balance; and
- Indigenous song is a central ritual form in every session, connecting participants to the land, ancestors and all living relations.

These principles - non-judgement and compassion, and beauty, relations and balance - are the spiritual foundations of the program.

In order to help participants develop a felt sense, or internal awareness, of non-violence and the Good Life Way, we teach a spiritual and physical practice of being in the present moment in the body. We use an approach called "embodiment practice," developed by Euro-American somatic therapist Susan Apoyshan (Apoyshan 1999; 2004.) This involves consciously attending to sensations and the circulation of energy through our bodies and out into the environment so that we are more physically present in our bodies and in our relationship with others and the earth. This practice not only counters the numbing and disassociation caused by violence but it also deepens sensory engagement with traditional spiritual practices that involve the body, such as songs, dances, using rattles, drumming, and medicines.

The program has three phases. The first, "Grounding in the Spirit/Gratitude," focuses on reaffirming a sense of each woman's basic goodness and begins to develop her somatic resources for an embodied connection with her Inner Spirit. The

second, "Transforming Anger, Cleansing and Lament," invokes traditions of collective prayer and ceremony that deal with anger, grief and loss. The third, "Celebrating Our Sacred Power/Performing Community," involves somatic affirmation of individual and collective strength and gifts, and a movement towards performance and ritual collective action. Each phase and session includes spiritual teachings, somatic exercises (embodiment practice and resource development), creative expression activities (dance, movement, drawing, writing around a theme), group dances and ceremony.

PHASE ONE: GROUNDING IN THE SPIRIT/GRATITUDE

The first phase of the program involves building up resources so that participants begin to have a felt sense of their goodness. We begin with the opening song, which acknowledges the Traditional territory on which we are standing. We have several drums and rattles for group members. Alannah teaches some Indigenous protocols about songs and then we sing the "George Family Song" to acknowledge the traditional and unceded territories of the Coast Salish peoples. The song is not only a reminder that the land is connected to a specific people but also a political statement about to whom the land belongs. We note that the land on which the Downtown Eastside is located was historically an intertribal gathering place for Coast Salish peoples and is still seen by some as rich with cultural spirituality.

The George Family Song is a public song, which means it can be taught to others to sing in public places. We repeat this song every session, eventually getting each woman to lead it and encouraging them all to take singing leadership outside the group. With the same intention, we close the group with another song, the Women Warrior Song, a public song from the women of Mount Currie (Lil'wat Nation). For women who have been silenced in multiple ways, singing is a culturally appropriate way of recovering voice. It reflects cultural self-esteem. We know how violent internalized racism is. So instead of having to introduce an intellectual analysis of the entire colonial historical dynamic, we are able to sing a song publicly and voice our sacred power in song as a way of restoring pride in where we come from.

The emphasis in the first phase of the program is to foster body-mind integration. This is the ability to be fully in one's body and to be able to express and feel what occurs in daily life, an ability that has been forgotten through the experience of chronic psychosocial trauma. Singing is one way of re-inhabiting the body, as is becoming aware of one's breath. Another way is "grounding," an activity that involves increasing awareness of sensation in the legs and feet and sensing the body's energetic connection to the earth. A third way is through increasing awareness of the core, the flow of energy from head to pelvic floor. We teach how to reestablish this sense of flow and a corresponding consciousness of oneself and one's centre. All these embodiment practices help us to connect to the present moment.

One of the challenges we face is that many women are afraid to feel their bodies, often because when they do, they become overwhelmed with emotions that are linked to past traumas. We do not want to retraumatize participants or provoke memories that make them feel bad, so a significant part of the early program work involves facilitating what is called "resource development." This term refers to providing tools to help contain the feelings that arise when women whose bodies have been numb for years start to "wake up." These resources provide basic "affect management skills," which teach the women how to recognize, tolerate and regulate strong and disturbing feelings-both positive and negative.

We present these resources in the context of spirituality, and encourage participants to draw upon them for help in and outside the course. We spend some time in the first few sessions developing a "sacred container" or "sacred place," or "spiritual being" in nature who becomes a source of guidance or consolation. Through a guided visualization process that incorporates focusing on body sensations, each women first finds these resources within herself. She then draws and/or dances the resource to increase its strength and the bodily sensations associated with it. We remind participants to use their resources when they notice they are anxious or upset, and we draw on them in different ways throughout the sessions. As with the breath and grounding exercises, these activities create positive experiences in the body, creating a

counter-memory of non-violence.

The traditional understanding of medicines is central throughout the program. We deepen our relationship with Mother Earth by developing our spiritual relationship with medicines and the ancestors. The medicines include the elements - earth, air, fire, water as well as animals and plants. Alannah explains that medicines are defined by our cultural relationship with the qualities of that element, plant or animal - a relationship of giving and receiving. A medicine is something with which one has an ongoing relationship. We teach how to make that relationship and acknowledge it in our bodies with movement.

PHASE TWO: TRANSFORMING ANGER, CLEANSING AND LAMENT

The second phase of the program addresses two things: the grief of the multiple deaths and losses that women have experienced throughout their lives, and the internalised oppression and self-hatred that is the result of being treated as inferior and of less value than those in the dominant society. The emotions of grief, pain, rage and bitterness that are lodged in the body need to be acknowledged, honoured and completed in some movement, gesture or creative manner.

The work of releasing and processing anger and grief is done both through somatic practices and the ceremonies of lament and cleansing. Many participants feel uncomfortable with expressing anger, often for cultural reasons. Though we acknowledge that the process of anger needs to be completed in the body, we believe anger does not have a place in ceremony and can do damage to community. Therefore we focus on basic somatic tools that can help release or move anger through the body, as well as transform its energy. We introduce a series of activities that involve voice; pushing (through the feet, eyes, head and pelvic floor) so that one has a physical sense of inhabiting or taking space; grounding to help set limits and boundaries; and learning how to sequence energy out of one's endpoints - the head, feet, hands, tail or pelvic floor. We then have participants role-play, taking an embodied non-violent stance in situations of conflict.

We have developed cleansing rituals to address internalised oppression. We use the terms "casting off" and "cleansing" to describe the process of getting rid of or brushing off negative spirits and of purifying a person or space. The "casting off" affects negative energies - such as negative feelings or self-concepts that have been generated through cultural stereotyping and injustice - that live in the body. To prepare for a cleansing ritual we each share cultural teachings from our different traditions that involve cleansing. We speak about how casting out and cleansing makes more space within us for our sacred vitality.

We developed two approaches to the expression of deep grief - one individual, the other collective. The first involves each person finding the place in her body in that moment where she feels most loss. She then moves through a creative expression sequence that involves first exploring the sensations in her body, drawing them, dancing them and then writing a poem about that loss. She shares this with one other person, and then the whole group. We then close with a brief ritual and prayer of compassion for self and community. The second lament process is a collective lament, which involves song, voice (wailing), movement together as a group, and a ritual closing. We do these lament rituals during our one day retreat outside the city, because this allows participants a full day to process their feelings and to feel and receive the support of the land, and our plant and animal relations.

PHASE THREE: CELEBRATING OUR WARRIOR-HEALER/PERFORMING COMMUNITY

On December 6th, 2001, the National Day Against Violence Against Women, our group chose to do a public lament ritual as part of a local event commemorating the violence that women in the Downtown Eastside had experienced. Combining song, drumming and a mourning dance - moving as a group with a long black cloth in the four directions, then closing with the Women's Warrior song - this ritual was a gesture of defiance and a promise to remember and honour the lives of all these women. As in the annual Valentine's Day Women's Memorial March which takes place in the Downtown Eastside and is led by local Native women, this public lament ritual is another example of giving "public expression to a complex process

through which the most marginalized women in Canada are emerging into public visibility. These women are engaged in a struggle to stay alive, and to change the material and symbolic conditions of existence for women who come after them" (Culhane 2004).

Public expression, or what we call "performing community," is the culmination of the program. The decision to create a community performance occurs in the third phase of the course. We support women to celebrate their individual and collective strength in a collective creation and, if they wish, to perform it in the community. This performance allows them to bear public witness to past and present suffering and injustice, and to embody a new vision of who they are and want to be. In the context of oppression, witnessing to and by one's peers becomes an antidote to being treated as an invisible object by the oppressor. For those who have been shamed publicly, public performance in one's own community is a way of reclaiming pride in one's identity.

As part of the process of embodying their strengths, participants first generate, through drawing and dance, their own understandings of being a warrior and healer, and identify the role they would like to play in contributing to their community. They learn more somatic ways of connecting to each other in group dances and how to transmit non-violent energy as a group.

Whether their dance is performed publicly or not, we incorporate it into a final ritual and ceremony of commitment and blessing.

In creating a performance the group actively makes meaning for itself and bears witness to both their individual and the group's collective sense of its power, sacredness and connection. In order to distinguish the performance from a show or spectacle, we create a sacred boundary around it with song and prayer, marking it as sacred time and sacred space. The performance is generative because, in circumscribing itself in sacred time and space, it acknowledges and calls on other powers beyond the performers. It reminds us that we do not have to rely just on ourselves - that the Creator, spirits and medicines can help us find the way back to harmony.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

One issue that we faced was the complexity of working together as an Indigenous woman and a white woman and as a traditional practitioner and a Christian. There has been the ongoing challenge of transforming the dynamics of colonizer/colonized inherent in our relationship. As well there has been the test of working in inner city areas where group members come from many Nations and spiritual traditions. There were usually a few participants, either from residential schools or from Christian fundamentalist groups, who carried Christian injunctions against traditional aboriginal spirituality. Others combined Christian practices with traditional ones. Some had rejected Christianity completely.

For Alannah, her intention has been to maintain the integrity of the teachings of oral traditions. This means to share them in a context that reflects connection to appropriate conditions, people, places and times. She recognizes that one of the multiple sites of struggle is cultural appropriation, where knowledge is decontextualised from the land and community relationships. When the sources of knowledge aren't credited or acknowledged, profit and power is appropriated from Native people. Negotiating ceremonies and protocols is a co-creative process that reflects and maintains equitable power dynamics that acknowledge and enhance community vitality in accordance with the traditional teachings.

For Denise, the challenge has been to represent an anti-colonial form of Christianity and only when this is appropriate. Her intention, as a Euro-Canadian, has been to find ways she can be accountable for the history of which she is part, acknowledging her complicity with it, and the benefits she has gained from it. At the same time, her struggle is to maintain integrity with the teachings of her own tradition that support non-violence, justice and interconnection. She affirms Indigenous analyses of the role and responsibility of the Church in the cultural genocide of Native peoples in North America. She has learned to uncover, in her own tradition, teachings that complement Native teachings, rather than appropriating the latter for her own.

Another significant issue is that as soon as a woman leaves the program, she re-enters an

environment where she is consistently devalued. It is hard to stay in one's body and remember one's goodness when faced by constant crises in one's family, the racism and sexism of day-to-day interactions, housing shortages, joblessness and one's ongoing vulnerability and exposure to violence as a Native woman. As well, there is a sense of confusion about how colonialism and displacement are ongoing and current, not just a thing of the past. A program like Restoring Sacred Vitality can only be effective when it is part of a comprehensive decolonisation strategy that includes community economic and social development that maintains, at its core, the necessity of addressing material, spiritual and social needs of Native women and children.

Several of the women who took this program eventually took more leadership in their communities or became more involved in community activities. Others who were already doing this continued to do so, in a more embodied and ceremonial way. Some still continued to have difficulties in getting out of situations that were harmful for them; for these women, the program's long-term impact was not immediately visible.

In the final analysis, a critical factor in this approach to repairing the effects of racist and colonial violence is repetition and development of a spiritual practice. Such practice includes the repetition of ceremonies, affirming traditional territories, using song and voice, affirming basic goodness and belonging and doing embodiment practice. Like any healing program, this will be only one small piece in each woman's healing journey. Each one takes what she can use and moves on. Hopefully, the teachings will be remembered and reinforced in other ways, throughout the women's lives.

RESTORING SACRED VITALITY AND DECOLONIZATION

As Linda Smith has written, when describing Indigenous research, the decolonization project involves "the unmasking and deconstruction of imperialism and colonialism in its old and new formations alongside a search for sovereignty, for reclamation of knowledge, language and culture and for the social transformation of colonial relations between the native and settler" (Tuhiwai Smith forthcoming). Colonialism constructed the native as Other, which has been lived out in the racial trauma etched onto the body-spirit (Dei, Karumanchery, Karumanchery-Luik 2004). For Native women living in inner cities, surviving on the faultline of the intersection of gender, race and class violence, who are marginalized both in the dominant society and in their communities, the meaning of deconstruction and sovereignty can start with repairing this trauma and reclaiming of cultural identity, in and through body-spirit.

Decolonizing the body involves healing the effects of gendered racism on the body-spirit and constructing an identity that allows one to be self-defining and self-naming. In resisting and challenging imposed structures of thinking and being that become lodged in the body, and in recovering the felt sense of connection with relations, Native women can re-experience the distinct quality of aliveness in their bodies - their sacred vitality.

The process of recovering this sacred vitality involves reversing the levels of disassociation and disconnection in the body caused by daily racial, sexual and colonial violence. It starts with developing a felt sense of one's basic goodness and the sacredness of the body and its connection to land and relations. The second phase involves completing, releasing and transforming the powerful emotions of grief, anger, sorrow and bitterness within a cultural and spiritual context that supports moving on with one's life. The third phase, of collectively embodying pride in who one is and who the group is and collectively witnessing in performance for the community, allows a public statement of identity that is no longer determined by reaction to the colonizer's gaze. All three phases of this decolonization process, informed by the principles of non-violence and the Good Life Way, create counter-memories of connection and sacredness that gradually replace the body memories of violence. In highlighting individual and collective cultural resilience, it supports each woman to move towards a self-determined agenda.

What sovereignty and self-determination means for Native women living off reserve and in urban centres, most of whom do not have access to band resources or a traditional land base, is a question that will be determined in the future. A program like Restoring Sacred Vitality builds up

cultural resiliency and provides internal resources and group support to enable women marginalized in inner cities to "challenge their status subordination" and participate in their community and society with a sense of their worth and power (Fraser 2001). Whether the example of the Salish woman who was able to use the support of the group to challenge the prohibition of her use of sage in her meetings at an outreach program for Native seniors in a mixed race center, or the Cree woman who confronted a social worker who was trying to apprehend a young woman's baby, or the Gitksan woman who taught us her clan's warrior dance so that we could perform it at the Women's Valentine Day Memorial March, all these women are engaging in everyday acts of resistance from which slowly a new collective understanding of the "freedom to be who one is" will emerge. In promoting an embodied spiritual practice of Indigenous teachings, the decolonizing task of a program like Restoring Sacred Vitality is to equip women with the ability to define and know, in and through their bodies, their own meanings of self-determination.

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