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Naanaaba'amii*: In the footsteps of others*

Limes, as understood in this collection, has more than one meaning. We focus on the idea of being poised between two worlds, cultures and languages and on the transition that may facilitated the entrance into a different social and cultural condition.[1] This paper looks at the recent history of Indigenous women in western Canada using this idea in two ways: first, the idea of a shared liminal space between cultures as a potentially decolonized meeting place where equitable conversations about cultural change can take place outside of the usual asymmetries of power; second, the idea of a step across a threshold that signals a transition to new and different social space.

We highlight the scope of *limes* as an interpretive frame for women's history: women inhabiting the *limes*, and women creating new *limites*. The paper is based on conversations with Anishinaabe women, especially Annette Owen of Pauingassi (AO) and Pinay Leveque (PL) of Little Grand Rapids in northeastern Manitoba. Both women have since passed on. Their voices are joined by others from their communities. The initial conversations were conducted entirely in Anishinaabemowin (sometimes called Ojibwe), the language of the Anishinaabe people. They have been made available for this historical and anthropological examination of changing women's roles over time thanks to the work of three translators, Margaret Simmons (MS), Pat Ningewance (PN), and the late Roger Roulette (RR). The Anishinaabemowin text, wherever possible, is presented as bilingual evidence so that scholars can return to the original words to recon-

1 As indicated in the call for papers for the present issue of this journal.

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sider meanings. The sensitive use of Indigenous women's stories is a hallmark of feminist anthropology. In her groundbreaking work on Athapaskan women's stories, Julie Cruikshank[2] observed that by attending to these stories, she came to see «the oral tradition not as "evidence" about the past but as a window on the ways the past is culturally constituted and discussed».[3]

The stories presented here have this quality. The women initially shared their stories in the early 1990s as part of a journalism/ethnohistory project with Margaret Simmons and Jennifer Brown about women's lives and experiences in the Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids First Nations in Manitoba on Treaty No. 5 territory.[4] In their conversations with Margaret Simmons, the two women reflect on the past and its implications in the present, providing an opportunity to interrogate both the context and meaning of important moments in the lives of women in their communities. Such anthropological

2 Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1990, p. 14.

3 Anthropologists have been using women's stories to support a feminist approach to anthropology for a very long time, for example in Nancy Ostreich Lurie, editor, *Mountain Wolf Woman, Sister of Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of a Winnibago Indian*, Chicago, University of Michigan Press, 1961. This seminal book was written in response to the famous account of her brother Crashing Thunder's life by Paul Radin, *Crashing Thunder: The Autobiography of an American Indian*, New York, D. Appleton and Co. Publishers, 1926. Few have done as much justice to the voices of Indigenous women as has Julie Cruikshank in collaboration with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 1998; and also in her prize-winning book, Julie Cruikshank, *Life Lived Like a Story: Life Stories of Three Yukon Native Elders*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska, Press, 1990 were the product of sensitive long term community fieldwork beginning in the 1970s. She later published the brilliant *Do Glaciers Listen?*, further exploring the nature of stories and the role of women in Athapascan society. The earliest historical scholarship on Indigenous women's histories in Western Canada was done by Sylvia Van Kirk, *"Many Tender Ties": Women in Fur-trade Society*, *1670-1870*, Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1980, and Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Strangers in Blood: Fur Trade Families in Indian Country*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1980, and Irene Spry, *From the Hunt to the Homestead*, Edmonton, University of Alberta Press, 1998. Most recently Laura Forsythe has used the same methodology in her PhD thesis about Métis women's experiences, University of Manitoba, 2022: *It Needs to be Said: Exploring the Lived Realities of the Grandmothers and Aunties of Métis Scholarship*, University of Manitoba, 2022 available at this stable URL: https://mspace.lib.umanitoba.ca/xmlui/handle/1993/37131

4 Maureen Matthews, Margaret Simmons, Jennifer S.H. Brown, *Tackling the Women: A. Irving Hallowell and Unfinished Conversations along the Berens River*, paper presented at the American Society for Ethnohistory, Portland, Oregon, November, 1995.

work needs a long timeframe, frequent visits based on friendship, and the open questions that Cruikshank believes are essential to effective communication. By paying attention to what the women are saying and the context in which they are saying it, the research evades the dangers posed by the «postcolonial narrative that depicts coherent, homogenous colonialism as an intractable template with predictable outcomes».[5]

The communities of Pauingassi (pop. 702) and Little Grand Rapids (pop.1,763)[6] are accustomed to explaining themselves to others. In the 1930s, they were visited by the American anthropologist, A. Irving Hallowell.[7] Over ten years, he visited these communities seven times, becoming famous himself while he put the Anishinaabe of the Upper Berens on the anthropological map. Their coherent explanations of what he came to call the «Ojibwa world view» and their insightful empiricism formed the basis of Hallowell's academic work.[8] They recently advocated for their unique cultural place in the world as partners in the three-million- hectare Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage site, celebrated in part because their boreal forest homeland has no mines, commercial forestry, industrial structures, or roads, and the rivers flow unimpeded from their source to Lake Winnipeg. Their most important argument for recognition, however, lies in the language they speak. Pimachiowin Aki is home to about one quarter of the fluent speakers of Anishinaabemowin in the world. The fact that the people live their lives in Anishinaabemowin and experience their homeland and its stories in their language makes this beautiful place valuable to the world.[9] As translator Roger Roulette put it, the discussions that happen in the language are transformative:

> when I hear the discussions or the debates in Ojibwe I see the power of the language, its reasoning, its complexity, its depth and how it can solve a problem almost instantaneously because it is in the

5 Julie Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?: Local Knowledge, Colonial Encounters, and Social Imagination*, Portland, University of Washington Press, 2005, p. 9.

6 Source: https://serdc.mb.ca/communities, accessed Feb 10, 2023.

7 A. Irving Hallowell, edited by Jennifer S. H. Brown and Susan Elaine Gray: *Contributions to Ojibwe Studies: Essays, 1934-1972*, in the series *Critical Studies in the History of Anthropology*, editors Regna Darnell and Stephen O. Murray, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2010.

8 Hallowell, *Contributions*, 2010, p. 365 and p. 535.

9 Maureen Matthews, Roger Roulette, *Minongeng, an Anishinaabe Utopia: A. I. Hallowell's Contribution to A UNESCO Anishinaabe World Heritage Landscape*, in *Utopia in the Present: Cultural Politics and Change*, edited by Claudia Gualtieri, Berlin, Peter Lang, 2018, pp. 121-140.

> language that the person thinks, sees, imagines, and dreams. This is the real person speaking.[10]

While these communities have maintained a linguistic buffer of sorts with the protection afforded by the UNESCO designation, they are not immune to the problems that plague other Indigenous communities in northern Manitoba. We argue that careful attention to the stories about women in these communities may provide new insight into these social issues and aid in addressing the colonial legacy, which has caused them to experience disproportionate instances of family breakdown, poor health and education outcomes, excessive numbers of children in care and excessive engagement with the justice system.

First Nations People in Canada

Canada is a country created by colonialism. In 1670, Britain granted the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) exclusive trading rights over the four-million sq.km Hudson Bay basin (approximately 40% of present day Canada). The HBC received a warm welcome from First Nations peoples who were already able traders connected to a transcontinental trade network. In exchange for furs, HBC traded European tools and materials while taking advantage of the Indigenous technologies to live and traverse Northern Canada. First Nations women played an active role in the fur trade. In addition to being indispensable to Indigenous family life, they manufactured decorative clothing that they exchanged with the HBC, and as their families welcomed these strangers, some became the influential wives and daughters of HBC traders engaged in translation and diplomacy.

In 1870, «Canada»[11] bought the HBC's trading area, and there after began negotiating the Numbered Treaties. These agree-

10 Roger Roulette, interview recorded by Maureen Matthews, 2003. When an interview is cited here, it was a taped radio documentary for which the interviewee gave permission to use the information in a publication, or a radio documentary. There are complete transcripts in English or Anishinaabemowin and if it is in Anishinaabemowin there is also a complete English translation. Maureen Matthews is in the process of making all the audio files, transcripts, and translations available on the web through the American Philosophical Society Library who have digitized all these interviews.

11 According to the Canadian Encyclopedia, «The HBC signed the deed of transfer surrendering its territory to the British Crown on 19 November 1869. The Crown, in turn, ceded the land to Canada. However, because of the political

ments set aside lands reserved for the exclusive use of First Nations «bands», granted annuities and equipment, protected hunting and fishing rights, and provided for schools and medicines. The leaders of Pauingassi and Little Grand are members of Treaty No. 5 made in 1875, which promised, among other things, that the Anishinaabeg would retain «the right to pursue their avocations of hunting and fishing throughout the tract surrendered».[12] They expected to share lands and resources and be part of an enduring, equal, and reciprocal relationship with mutual benefits and responsibilities. Things changed radically when Canada unilaterally imposed the Indian Act of 1876, reneging on promises made to their treaty partners. This Act established the federal Department of Indian Affairs, giving «Indian Agents» as local managers of First Nations communities and their lands, the power to disregard existing traditions of leadership and enforce the prohibition of spiritual and religious ceremonies. In 1883, the Department established Indian Residential Schools (IRS) and forced many thousands of Indigenous children to attend. The shameful history and genocidal impact of the IRS in Canada was recently exposed to Canadians by the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).[13] The TRC summarized the impact of these schools saying that:

> the central goals of Canada's Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments, ignore Aboriginal rights, terminate the Treaties, and through a process of assimilation, cause Aboriginal peoples to cease to exist as distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada. The establishment and operation of residential schools were the central element of this policy, which can best be described as «Cultural Genocide».[14]

disruption of the Red River rebellion, the transfer did not come into effect until 15 July 1870». See https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/rupert-land. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 acknowledged First Nations. See Arthur J. Ray, *I Have Lived Here Since the World Began: An Illustrated History of Canada's Native Peoples*, Toronto, Key Porter Books, 1966, p. 362.

12 Maureen Matthews, Jean Friesen, Roger Roulette, *Onashowaadeg Agwi'idiw in Nanaan Omemewisibiing: Gaa-Ganawendaagin Berens Enawendiwaadimaa Manitoba Museum/Negotiating Treaty Number Five at Berens River: The Berens Family Collection at the Manitoba Museum*, Winnipeg, Manitoba Museum, 2021, pp. 54-55.

13 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *A Knock at the Door: The Essential History of Residential Schools from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2015. See also https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525 .The first IRS in Manitoba, the Birtle Residential School, opened in 1888.

14 *Ibidem*, p. 3.

The personal and collective social impact of this policy on First Nations peoples can hardly be overstated and the shock of learning about this brutal colonial intervention in Indigenous lives has created a narrow narrative lens through which the current social problems of First Nations peoples are perceived. The focus on Residential Schools as sites of social suffering, which they surely were, has diverted attention away from the impacts of other colonial interventions and experiences that continue to play a negative role in Indigenous lives.

This is particularly the case from the perspective of the people of Pauingassi, and Little Grand Rapids First Nations, located on the remote upper reaches of the Berens River. Until the 1940s, visiting Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids involved a canoe voyage of about 100 kilometers, up the Berens River and over fifty-two sets of rapids, carrying a canoe and cargo over each portage. It was enough to discourage government officials from making the trek. As a result, their history does not include their children being forcibly removed to attend Indian Residential Schools.[15]

Their remote location also meant that they engaged relatively late in the 20th century with the Indian Affairs bureaucracies that so aggressively ordered the lives of other First Nations. Little Grand Rapids and Pauingassi only became a «band», the smallest self-governing unit under the Indian Act, in the late 1930s. For about 120 years after treaties were signed, the fur trade life, trapping in the winter, guiding tourist fishermen in the summer, and some commercial fishing in the fall, continued to provide families in the Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids with respected work.

In the early 1980s, the economic viability of trapping waned and the process of engagement with the Indian Affairs bureaucracy accelerated. These communities, which had been resilient and independent for over 200 years, were asked to accept responsibility for devolved government roles in education, health and welfare. On the face of it, this seems like a move towards local autonomy but by the 1990s, these educational, medical, and social programs, nominally under the control of First Nations, had disrupted communities, imposing settler-colonial social values and undermining indigenous families and communities and harming their children. As Tait and

15 The First Nations communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, in northern Manitoba are in Treaty No. 5 territory. Their representatives attended the making of treaty Sept 20th, 1875, at Berens River 100 miles west, at the mouth of the Berens River and officially joined an adhesion to the Treaty the following year

Stefanick argue, the child welfare system is a continuing force of colonization.[16]

Given the overwhelmingly negative impact of IRS on those who attended, there has been a tendency to attribute the desperate fate of Indigenous children to the immediate and intergenerational impacts of IRS which contributed to Indigenous families' lack of «parenting skills». However, it is not just the impacts of IRS that have harmed children, families and communities. Canada has failed to provide culturally appropriate child welfare services in Indigenous communities and its funding model has resulted in children being unnecessarily removed from their families and communities causing «egregious harm» through ongoing «systemic racial discrimination».[17] This ongoing discrimination also destroys the social fabric of Indigenous communities.[18] Still, the idea that social disintegration in Indigenous communities is caused by intergenerational historical trauma initiated in IRS experiences is an explanation that resonates with survivors. Margaret Simmons, who conducted many of the interviews for this paper, is a residential school survivor. She lived in Berens River, a community on the shore of Lake Winnipeg, and like many other children from the community, was forced to go to the Birtle residential school[19] when she was thirteen.

> MS - You always hear people say that native women are not good parents, or that native people are not good parents. I think that to be a good parent you need a good model, and our models were taken away from us.
> I was thirteen years old [when I went to residential school]. Before you're thirteen you're considered a girl so when I became a young woman at age thirteen, I didn't have a mother or a grandmother to teach me things like parenting skills. You need that. Home making

16 Myra Tait and Lorna Stefanick, *Crisis in Care: Structural Poverty, Colonization and Child Apprehensions in Canada* (forthcoming). See also First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada v Canada (AG) 2016 CHRT 2.

17 First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada v Canada (AG) 2019 CHRT 39 at para 149.

18 First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada v Canada (AG) 2019 CHRT 39 at para 193.

19 On the east side of Lake Winnipeg, starting in the early 1900s, children from the communities that bordered the lake were sent to residential schools. Margaret Simmons, one of the contributors to this article, attended elementary school in her community, but was sent for secondary schooling to Birtle IRS, almost 600 km away, for up to ten months at a time (MS Pers. Comm. 1995)

> skills, you need that…. That was lacking in our upbringing [because of being at boarding school]. And you see that today.[20]

However, a history of destructive incarceration in IRS does not explain why there is social destruction in communities like Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids. Researchers have found that First Nations children throughout the province have poorer health outcomes (premature birth, low birthweight, higher incidence of mental and physical health issues and shorter life expectancy) than the rest of the population of the province.[21] The problems of drug abuse, children in care, failure in school, and overrepresentation in the justice system are ubiquitous in Northern Indigenous communities even though community histories are very different, so it is interesting to look at what has happened in Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids where the explanation involving Residential school destroying parenting skills does not apply.

In contrast to the communities on the lakeshore, there were very few IRS students from Little Grand Rapids and none from Pauingassi.[22] Because the children were not taken away, the communities had a very different history than others in Treaty 5 territory and, for a while, they also had quite different outcomes. When the American anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell visited Little Grand Rapids and Pauingassi throughout the 1930s, he found a group of Anishinaabe people who were still practicing their ceremonies unmolested by the Canadian authorities and relatively uninfluenced by Christian missionaries.[23] The laws against conducting ceremonies that were brutally enforced elsewhere to the end of the first half of the 20th century were unknown to them. Although there were a few missions to the area, the first Christian missionary to have any influence in Pauingassi, the Mennonite schoolteacher, Henry Neufeld, didn't arrive in the

20 Margaret Simmons interview recorded by Matthews, 1995.

21 Our Children, Our Future: http://mchp-appserv.cpe.umanitoba.ca/deliverable.php?referencePaperID=88226&_gl=1*pxh748*_ga*ODQ4NDk3NTg3LjE1NzYzNzE2MjQ.*_ga_5KL2MD48DQ*MTY3NzY4ODUwMC42LjEuMTY3NzY4ODUzNy4yMy4wLjA

22 They had no school at all until 1956 when they invited a Mennonite school teacher from Little Grand Rapids to come and set one up. Henry Neufeld conducted classes in Anishinaabemowin for seven years and even after the teachers began to teach English, the school had relatively little impact on language and culture in either community.

23 Hallowell, *Contributions*, 2010. See also A. Irving Hallowell, *The Ojibwa of the Berens River, Manitoba: Ethnography into History*, edited with a preface and afterword by Jennifer S. H. Brown, in *Case studies in Cultural Anthropology*, general editors George and Louise Spindler, New York, Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1992.

community until 1956 and came as a teacher at their invitation. He and his family became fluent Anishinaabemowin speakers and their continuing support of the language, along with their sincere engagement with the people for over 50 years, meant that language fluency in Pauingassi was preserved and with it, a vibrant Anishinaabe worldview. In 1992, when MM first went to Pauingassi, Christianity among the Elders in the community appeared to be an addition to an otherwise fully functioning Anishinaabe ontology. If someone said they were a Christian, they were signaling a heartfelt rejection of alcohol consumption,[24] while still being completely willing to explain the nature of Thunderbird power and the gifts of the Memegwesiwag.[25]

In interviews from the 1990s,[26] concern about the social impact of settler-colonial interventions became evident and Elders in the community reflected on the causes and possible solutions of the social changes they were beginning to see. They knew alcohol was very disruptive and almost every Elder spoke about this, but we will focus here on some stories told by women that hint at other ways their world was being plucked apart by the intrusions of professionals serving the colonial education and medical systems.

We come back to the idea of limes here - the liminal space, a doorway between cultures, a place into which we step while trying to discover the meanings of each other's lives. It becomes a generative space when the people we wish to understand are willing to step into that space too and participate in friendly interrogation of other ways of seeing, feeling, and experiencing the world. The conversations that follow, between Margaret and Annette and the other Elders, reveal the thoughts and experiences of women in remote communities, growing up in an Anishinaabe way and registering the impact of colonizing culture. They are aware of the significance of these encounters in their own lives and see how these seemingly small changes are altering the pattern of life in their community. By offering their

24 https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/first-nations-prohibition-of-alcohol

25 Maureen Matthews, *Naamiwan's Drum: Anishinaabe and Anthropological Perspectives in a Contested Cross-Border Repatriation*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2016, pp. 200-201.

26 These interviews were conducted with permission from the interviewees for the purpose of making broadcast radio documentaries. Seven documentaries, two of which were produced entirely in Anishinaabemowin, have been aired in the community as part of a journalistic/anthropological engagement that has spanned more than 30 years starting in 1992.The original tapes have been digitized, transcripts and translations prepared for many, and where possible the tapes and translations have been shared with the family.

thoughtful comments, they are opening the door to a critical conversation about the future, well aware that they are on the threshold of new way of living.

Women's Worlds

Until very recently, among Anishinaabe who lived on the northeast side of Lake Winnipeg, men and women were governed by different rules. Marie Francoise Guédon writes about learning «general principles of conduct» for women[27] or what Hallowell simply called the «Rules about Women».[28] These rules about women seemed to be broadly shared across northern peoples in the past and some of the examples given by Guédon were also expected behavior in Pauingassi. One of them has to do with women moving carefully in the world, walking a narrow path, and not stepping over anything belonging to men or boys.[29] This same rule was at one time very carefully observed in Pauingassi. Margaret and Annette both were aware of the protocol:

> AO - That's what was taught to me too. My mother used to tell me to be careful with my older brothers' things, their hats. Don't step over them. But I wasn't told why. That's all she used to tell me. «I just wonder why she said that», I thought. «I wonder what will happen to the man if he is stepped over».
>
> Even his tools could not be stepped over. And she also told us, this is what was taught to us, while a woman is sick, when she has «bear cubs», I'll say, she is not to touch her husband's, her older brother's, or any men's belongings or tools.
>
> MS - ... his nets, axe, rabbit snares. His gun. Is this what was done to you too?
>
> AO - That's what they said. That's because a man would not be able to kill anything **if his power was cancelled out by a woman**. That's what they said, his power would be cancelled out.

27 Marie Françoise Guédon, *Dene Ways and the Ethnographer's Culture*, in David Young, Jean-Guy Goulet (eds), *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experienc*e, Toronto, Broadview Press, 1994, pp. 39-70.

28 A. Irving Hallowell, *Notes about Religious Purity*, in Hallowell papers, American Philosophical Society Archives, n/d. See also Robert Brightman, *Grateful Prey: Rock Cree Human-Animal Relationship*, Regina, Canadian Plains Research Center, University of Regina, 2002.

29 Guédon, *Dene ways*, p. 42.

> Including his belongings/tools. He would not be able to kill an animal if a woman cancelled out his power.[30]
>
> *AO – Amii geniin gaa-izhi-gikino'amaagoowaan. Nimaamaa ko manaajitaaw gisayeyag a'iin odaya'iimiwaan odaanikwaaniwaan. Gego baazhidawaaken. Gaawiin dash nin-gii-onji- wiindamaagosii wegonen onji. Amii eta ko gaa-izhid. Amii eta ska wegonen gaa-gii-onji-ikidod, nin-gii-inendam. Amanjige-izhised awe inini sa baazhida'ond.*
>
> *Booshke odaabajitaawin inini ji-baazhida'igaadenig. Ya'ii aaniish miinawaa nin-gii-igonaan, amii gaa-izhi-gikino'amaagooyin ono amii megwaa ikwe e-aakozid e-makoonsiwid nin-ga-ikid, egaa ji-zaaminang onaabeman gemaa osayeya, ininiwag odaabajitaawiniwaa'.*
>
> *MS - ...shkeasabii', waagaakwad, waaboozo-nagwaagwan. Amii iwe izhi-gegoon baashkizigan. Amii na gegiin gaa-doodaagooyin?*
>
> *AO - Amii gosha gaa-ikidowaad. Gaawiin aaniish awiya o-daa-gii-nitoosiin gegoon* ***gaakani'aapan ininiwan****. Gaakani'aapan ininiwan gii-iki-dowag. Odaabajitaawining. Gaawiin win aya'aawishan o-daa-gii-nisaasiin naabe gaakani'igopan ikwewan.*[31]

This rule about the conduct of women had broad social consequences. If the rule was broken, the men in the family were affected. Margaret translated a conversation with her friend Pinay from Little Grand Rapids who had much the same explanation. In the old days, the young women were confined to a small tipi, a *piikogaan*, when menstruation began:

> When a young woman has her first period, her first menstrual cycle, Pinay says, if you touch hair your hair it won't grow. And if you remember, Annette was talking about when the mother or the grandmother put the young woman in the *piikogaan* for her first period, she said they would braid her hair just so that that young girl wouldn't touch her hair.
> And if the girl happened to look at a young man during that time – then that man won't be able to do anything. He'll lose his strength. Won't be able to hunt. Won't be able to fish and things like that

30 This unruly power seems to be associated with the onset of menses and is not something that either the woman or anyone else can control. It was treated as a frank danger but could be effectively managed by observing proper protocols.

31 Annette Owen, interview recorded by Matthews, 1995, translated by Patricia Ningewance, 2015.

> for survival, so that's where that word: *ji-gaakani'aadininiwan.* – she would cancel out a man's power.
>
> She'll spoil his strength. He'll become very weak. He won't get sick, but he'll get weak muscles and so on and of course if you become weak, you're not going to have the stamina to be able to hunt and trap and travel great distances to support your family. So, they were very careful about that. And that's probably why they kept that young girl in a separate dwelling so that she would not accidentally look at men.[32]

In this conversation, Margaret was struck by the words «*Ji-gaakani'aadininwan*, that a man should be made useless and ineffectual» <because of being seen by a girl. The protocol was vigorously enforced because the consequences did not fall on the girl but on the community as a whole. When Annette's daughter had her first period, she was kept home alone in a room and although there was no little tipi for her, the rules were observed. Annette said that in later years, the schools started to insist that the girls must go to school even when they had their first period. As she frames it, the mothers might have worried for their daughters, but they despaired for their sons. With the girls at school, the boys' lives would inevitably be altered for the worse. An energetic young man who was a good hunter was a huge asset to the community and fed many families. The missionary Luther Schuetze[33] who was in Little Grand Rapids in the 1950s spoke about such a young man:

> Maamaan was perhaps the most successful hunter I ever knew, and the most open-hearted at giving...Maamaan...would dream, and the Good Spirit would tell him where the moose were. Within a day or so he would return with a canoe load of meat to which everyone was welcome.[34]

In the view of these women, it is not that the parents lacked skills, what they lacked was the conviction that they could guide their boys. The practice of sequestering girls ended with the arrival of local schools and community-based nurses. Margaret remembered how this also affected her relationship with her mother. She said the

32 Margaret Simmons, translating and discussing an Anishinaabemow in interview with Pinay (Rita) Keeper, recording Matthews 1995.

33 Luther Schuetze, *Mission to Little Grand Rapids: Life with the Anishinaabe 1927 - 1938*, Vancouver, Creative Connections Publishing, 2001.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 162.

Indian Health Services nurses told her about the changes that were coming before her mother had a chance:

> All of a sudden, they called us. Oh, I think I was probably in grade 6, grade 7, they called all the young girls over to the nursing station and they showed us films and slide strips of women's cycles and how to do cleanliness. So, when I went home, my mom asked me why we were called, and I told her. So, I think after that she never felt obligated to tell me - so that part of our relationship was missing. Maybe she was in the process of explaining to me and you know, but somebody else took that role. It was taken away from her.[35]

These lost opportunities to pass on the protocols that keep one's children safe are experienced as a form of grief. The children are endangered, and parents are powerless to act. To understand the significance to the parent of failing to warn a child, it may be helpful to look at this idea from a broader Anishinaabe perspective. In Anishinaabe explanations of events, there is no concept comparable to the English idea of luck.[36] The Anishinaabe speakers we talked to in Pauingassi in the 1990s didn't believe in luck nor did they believe in coincidences. Everything happened for a reason and had a purpose. One's life is more or less ordered at birth.[37] The number of children one will have and the length of one's life is predetermined. Anishinaabe people value the right to live the life that was intended for them. The agency and autonomy of the person is prized, and their ideal is that they will be able to make the choices they were intended to make for themselves: that they control their own volition. There is also a belief that lives can be derailed by a very powerful medicine man or by someone using bad medicine who wishes to influence them, or they can inadvertently make a mistake and offend someone powerful. But there is no word for plain dumb luck. There are three Anishinaabe words that refer to these ideas and might be translated as luck but that is not what they are really about:

> *Baakinaage* – he/she wins by their skill or by being clever - not really «luck» because it refers to an outcome that was predestined or already their fate -

35 Margaret Simmons interview recorded by Matthews, 1995.
36 Matthews, *Naamiwan's Drum*, 2016, p. 216.
37 *Ibidem*, p. 257.

Mamige – he/she wins because they have help - somebody, a powerful medicine man or spirit helper allows him to win -
Masagozi – this is often glossed as bad luck, but it really means that the person is jinxed by someone who is against him/her.[38]

There is also this correlative, the firm belief that there are people who will try to knock you off your intended path in life. Women are especially at risk of being caught by love magic. Love magic is like hunting magic – it is bad medicine. Hunting medicine makes the moose foolish. You will succeed in killing a moose because the medicine makes the moose foolish, one has interfered with his life as it was meant to be. Hunting medicine is only used when the need is

extreme because it takes a long time or a large effort to restore one's relationship with the spirit of the moose after having done such a thing. Love medicine is bad because it is interfering with the life of another person so that he/she does not live the life they are meant to live, a good life, *baataa'idizowin*. Love medicine involves what anthropologists call sympathetic magic. One acquires something of that other person and uses it against them:

MM So were women fearful about that?
MS Oh yea. [My former partner] was very worried. When I was travelling, he would always tell me to be very careful, «tie your hair back and be careful you don't leave any stray hairs and don't let anybody touch your hair. Don't let anybody pick hair off your clothes if you happen to have a stray hair». One time, I forget where we went, but he said, «Oh you and Maureen! Your hair! Do something with it! It was always just hanging!» I've got mine tied back now. He was very annoyed.
MM What was he afraid of?
MS Somebody would put my hair into, let's say, love medicine - they call it medicine, not everybody has it, but he was afraid that that person might use it on me and that I would leave him and go to this other man.[39]

Anishinaabe women, in old photos, often have their hair tied in a scarf and they have lots of hair pins. Those women are ensuring their autonomy. They are not giving anyone the opportunity to influence their lives. Margaret's mother had rules about this too:

38 Roger Roulette, Pers. Comm. 2010.
39 Margaret Simmons interview recorded by Matthews, 1995.

MS Yea, you couldn't leave stray hairs laying around. If you combed your hair, you stood and combed your hair in one spot, you didn't walk around and brush your hair.
MM And when she cut your hair, what would your mother do?
MS She would twirl it and put it into a little ball and then go throw it in the fire and burn it because she was afraid that somebody was going to find that piece of hair, take it with them, and put it in their medicine bag to be used as love medicine and this was taught to us.[40]

Protecting oneself from love medicine puts the onus on women to be vigilant and police their behavior, messages that are hard for parents to sustain in the more permissive world in which we now live. Parents watch their daughters flaunt these rules and worry. The conflict in values

undermines the rationale that enables active Anishinaabe parenting and prevents passing on ideas about autonomy and self-reliance to young women.[41]

Anishinaabe stories, legends, and everyday expressions all lend understanding to these rules of conduct for women. These ideas are still active in Pauingassi. It might take the form of a gentle rebuke. If one is going to do something that the old people think is a bit risky, an old lady would say, «You have children», suggesting the consequences will come back, either to oneself, one's family, or to the community if one makes a mistake.

One of the Pauingassi Elders that Roger Roulette knew well, Charlie George Owen (CGO), who is known in the community as Omishoosh, told a story about a woman who made a mistake with a rabbit:

> So, a woman in his community (Anaak, Mary Anne Keeper) was affected by this phenomenon as I call it. The old woman was very uncomfortable. On her head and on her back, she was very cold and sore, especially on her head. And I guess she called on Charlie George.
>
> «She shouldn't have been sick», he says. «They'd pray for her for a while, and she'd be well for just for a little while and then the condition would return. That's what she told me», he said.

40 *Ibidem*.

41 This experience is also shared by immigrant families. See:Vappu Tyyskä, *Parents and Teens in Immigrant Families. Cultural Influences and Material Pressures*, Montreal, Canadian Diversity/Diversité canadienne, 2008. For immigrant families this conflict originates from coming to Canada whereas for First Nations families, these troubles came to them.

> Although she went to the doctor, she couldn't find out what was wrong with her, he said.
> «She shouldn't have been sick», he said to her. There was nothing to indicate that there was some sort of sickness that she may have had.
>
> He said, «I started thinking about her. What kind of illness would have caused that kind of distress on her and I started to sort of envision something. I had a strong recollection of a rabbit».
>
> «I told my [wife]», he said, «to go and see the old woman and see how she's doing». I told her I had a dream of rabbits piled up and they both agreed that that was the cause of her condition. She did something to a rabbit.
>
> When she was a girl, she apparently caused offense to a rabbit. She had skinned a live rabbit. She peeled the head and up towards the back of the rabbit and then let it go while it was still alive. You see the rabbit is very vindictive and a vengeful spirit and this is why the condition is so severe.
>
> Again, his wife went over to see the old woman and the old woman had spoken to her. «I have lost what was wrong with me. I have utmost respect for you and appreciate you».
> Because now there was nothing wrong with her. It went away because she realized what protocol she had broken and now nothing's wrong with her today because she had taken care of it. Charlie George says, «that was the reason why, because I had understood that», he said. «It was the rabbit that was responsible for her condition».
>
> He uses the word *baataadizoo* which means self-inflicted illness. At the end, Charlie George says, «I'm not the only one that's aware of this. Our ancestors were aware of this». And what did he mean by looking after it? First of all, one has to understand the mistake and the other thing is to appease the offended spirit in this case, the spirit of the rabbit, by having a feast. So that's how they would do it.[42]

The healing process described here by Roger Roulette involves bringing a problem to a medicine man with the interpretive ability to think through the affliction. One must tell him every mistake that might be relevant - although typically he can guess and is just waiting for the truth. Having identified an error, a prescription might be

42 Charlie George Owen interview recorded by Roger Roulette and Maureen Matthews, 1994.

suggested: a ceremony, a feast, a prayer, or some observance that the patient alone will know about. And there will be a warning that reinforces the understanding that the spirit beings are watching.

Charlie George was modest about his role, but this was a formidable gift, and he was highly respected in the community for helping others in this way. This kind of story reinforces complex rules about behavior that are meant to be preventive, so friends and family won't be afflicted, or they will quickly understand the mistake they have made. When he told us this story, Charlie George and the other Elders in the community still talked about the spiritual world in terms that Hallowell would have instantly recognized. Sixty-five years later, and they were still formulating those ideas solely in Anishinaabemowin and in this story, Anishinaabe healing practices have a better outcome than «the Doctor». But as contemporary medicine gradually came to these remote communities, the idea that medical effectiveness required a sometimes-uncomfortable confession to a strict Elder was replaced by a growing realization that one could also get well after a quick visit to the nurse who had penicillin and would give it without judgement. This is how wisdom and Indigenous technical knowledge are lost in First Nations communities.

The knowledge of very effective Indigenous herbal remedies and salves was endangered in thisway. This crucial medical knowledge was and, in many places still is, considered the special province of semi-human spirit entities with seemingly magic powers, the *Memegwesiwag*. The *Memegwesiwag* are not well known outside of these northern communities in large part because there is no English word for them.[43] Almost every northern community has a nearby cliff where *Memegwesiwag* live. If they don't live there any more it is because they find the hubbub of modern life disruptive, but they stay near enough to help humans. Their kindness is legendary. They are short, about three feet high, have long hair and small noses, and paddle about on lakes and rivers in the evening in canoes of thinly carved stone. They are known as the great experts on stone and are credited with teaching the Anishinaabe how to make arrowheads and stone tools. They are happy to help the Anishinaabe but not particularly trustful of non-indigenous people. If you are blessed with the offer to visit

43 Maureen Matthews, CBC Radio Documentary transcript, on *Ideas*, aired November 2007. *Memegwesiwag*. See also Maureen Matthews, Roger Roulette, Rand Valentine, *Anishinaabemowin*: The Language of *Pimachiowin Aki*, a Background Research Paper for the Pimachiowin Aki UNESCO World Heritage site proposal, 2010.

them, an experience spoken of as a dream, they will teach you how to heal with herbal medicines. Most old Anishinaabe herbalists, who are typically women, would credit *Memegwesiwag* with giving them the knowledge of the plants and the recipes for medicines for specific ailments and sometimes even the medicines themselves.

About halfway between Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids, there is a steep rock wall on an island in Family Lake, as Elder David Owen of Pauingassi explained:

> In Pauingassi they call it Spirit Island, *Manidoominis*, this was a place where one [*memengwesi*] was seen. This is what one old man (*Twaamad)* said at the shore to his wife. He apparently said to his wife, «I'm going to go on a visit». He was visiting those very ones.
>
> When he boarded [his canoe], his wife didn't see where he had gone. Looking around, suddenly she noticed him paddling by, turning towards Spirit Island. Near the face of the cliff, he disappeared. He was visiting the *memengweshiwag!* Amazing! This is the type of story they told of them.
>
> He [*memengwesi*] was often seen by the living [*Anishinaabeg*]. He also often spoke to the living. It was also said he used to give medicine. The kind they call Anishinaabe medicine. This was when he [*memengwesi*] healed the living. They had many stories about these kinds of things.
>
> *Ishkeiya'iing Obaawingaashiing, Manidoominis gaa-idamowaad. Mii aaniish imaa miinawaa gaa-gii-izhi-waabamaagobanen-, gaa-gii-izhi-ikidogobanen bezhig akiwenzi imaa niiwanaanig wiiwan iya'aa Twaamad. Ayi'ii akawe nga-mawadishiwe odigoo' iinzan, odinaan. Miiwan ini wiiwan. Miiwa' iniweniwa' e-gii-mawadisaad.*
>
> *Mii e-ani-boozid, mii gaawn ogii-waabamigosiin aandi gaa-ani-izhaad mii ini wiiwan. Ingodin iinzan ayinaabid wedi mishawagaam gaa-gii-waabamaad e-made-bimakizhiwenid. Mii wedi gwekiwan manidoominising. Mii imaa gaa-izhi-aasamaabikaanig, mii imaa apan. E-gii- mawadisaad memengweshiwa'! Maamakaaj! Mii iwe gaa-inaajimin jo'o dinoowikaan.*
>
> *Ogii-nitaa-waabamigoon gaye bemaadizinij. Gaye ogii-nitaa-ganoonaa' bemaadizinij. Iwe gaye gii-nitaa-miigiwe mashkiki ogii-inaawaan. Mii owe Anishinaabe mashkiki gaa-idamowaad. E-gii- nanaandawi'aad bemaadizinij. Niibiwa gegoon ogii-ayinaajimaawaan miiwan o' dinoowikaanan*.[44]

44 David Owen interview recorded by Margaret Simmons and Maureen Matthews, transcribed and translated by Roger Roulette, 2006.

One of the things that Anishinaabe people learn in encounters with the *Memegwesiwag* is the protocol for collecting medicines. Charlie George Owen explained that it is necessary to give thanks appropriately:

> RR: Do you remember what they used to say when they acquired medicine when they went into the bush?
>
> CGO: They used to say this, «Whatever type of help for life is provided, this is what I hope», they'd say. Some even sang there. They would speak of the divine gift they'd be given.
> But they used tobacco before they took anything. If they were going to take some medicine, they'd first make a prayer with a pipe. They would first talk while rotating a pipe with the tobacco. That was the only way I'd go retrieve medicine.
> I still maintain this. This is why I'm happy that you've come to ask me about this. As you know, these are not my words. It's the old Anishinaabeg's work. Their work was apparent. This is what I'm telling you. Do you fully understand?
>
> RR: Ah, definitely. I understand everything. My late father did the same thing.
>
> RR: *Giminjimendaan na ako aaniin gaa-ikidowaad apii odaapinamowaad mashkiki noopimiing izhaawaad?*
>
> *CGO: Gii-ikidowagwiino'o, 'wegonen isa gaa-dinoowango'owe ji-ondinamaan bimaadiziwin mii-sa 'owe begosenimoyaan,' gii-ikidowag. Abooshke aanind gii-nigamowag i'imaa. Mii akawe gii-inootamowaad gegoon ji-miinigoowiziwaad ina.*
> *Asemaan idash ogii-aabaji'aawaan e-gii-abiwaad dabwaa odaapinamowaad 'owe gegoon. Mashkiki gaa-wii-odaapinamowaad akawe gii-inaakonigewag. Akawe gii-gaagiigidowag e-gii- gizhibaayaakonaawaad asemaan ono opwaaganan. Mii 'iwe eta gaa-izhi-aawadoowaan mashkiki na.*
> *Mii 'owe geyaabi gaa-ganawendamaan. Mii 'owe gaa-onji-minwendamaan e-gii-bi- gagwejimiyeg gegoon. Gaawiin aaniish niin 'owe ndikidowin. Wiinawaa ndinigoog gete- anishinaabeg odanokiiwiniwaa, mii gaa-bimi-izhinaagwaninig ina. Amii 'owe gidizhi- wiindamooninim o'owe. Weweni ginisidotaan?*
>
> RR: *Ah, miinange. Gakina gegoon inisidotaan. Geniin mbaabaayiban, ndedeyiban mii gewiin gaa-izhichiged*.[45]

45 Charlie George Owen (Omishoosh), interview recoded by Roger Roulette and Maureen Matthews, 1994.

Until Western nurses and doctors arrived in these communities, the *Memegwesiwag* were thought to be the primary source of this practical medical knowledge. The Anishinaabe herbalists were the experts on fevers, burns, and rashes. Many people still acknowledge the *Memegwesiwag* as teachers, but this understanding is fragile and depends almost entirely on an Anishinaabemowin cultural context. Like the practice described above, where Charlie George was consulted and possible causes canvased, this understanding survives only as long as the language survives. And medical talk is all English now.

The ubiquity and efficacy of modern medicines and the power relationship that is established by the authority of the nursing station and «the Doctor», undermines not just faith in Anishinaabe healing technologies but also the idea that people can learn something useful in the bush, that it is situational knowledge. They may be healed by penicillin, but they will come away with what one might call an ontological impairment, a flickering doubt about whether what they once believed is in fact true. This colonial process happens little by little, sapping belief and removing the authority of storytellers and Elders in the community. Their stories seem more and more remote from experience. The Elders' stories, which contain vivid warnings about mistakes and explain encounters with the *Memegwesiwag*, were formerly told as families traveled on the rivers and lakes. The landscape acts as a mnemonic, a prompt for teaching. Because people are not living in the bush and travelling as they once did, regularly passing the places where encounters with the *Memegwesiwag* happen, the narrative thread is lost. Margaret reflected about this in a conversation about the *Memegwesiwag* with her uncle Alan Bittern:

> It's a different life than it used to be. No one goes to the trap lines now. Nobody goes to the bush. Nobody travels around. Hunting is very rare. These old people were travelling around, living off the land on their trap lines out on the rivers and lakes, and obviously they lived among these little men, the *Memegwesiwag*. Alan makes a very strong point here. You don't find people telling these stories anymore because they don't live that life and they're not out there, they're not meeting them.[46]

Women who were midwives and herbal healers were among the first to be co-opted into the new medical model – they were hired as

46 Alan Bittern interview recorded by Margaret Simmons and Maureen Matthews, 2006.

Community Health workers and charged with translating medical questions and recommendations into Anishinaabemowin. They were invited to use their own prestige as known healers in the community to extend the reach of modern medicine which has historically trivialized their traditional knowledge. But in Pauingassi and Little Grand, the greatest harm came with the arrival of local child welfare services. By 2000, an indigenous social worker had moved to Pauingassi. By 2009, 80 percent of the children in Pauingassi were in care, seized and removed from the community on the pretext of saving them, to live in hotel rooms in Winnipeg.[47]

The children in Pauingassi were apprehended because their families were judged by colonial standards as incapable of safely parenting, undermining and denying the community's capacity to care for their own children.[48] There are two broad reasons for taking children into care, abuse and neglect. Fewer than 10 percent of Indigenous children are apprehended because of abuse, but more than half are apprehended because of neglect, including inadequate housing (which is not under the control of the parents on reserves with overcrowded housing situations) or poverty (also not under the parent's control).[49] Being taken into care is highly detrimental to the child.[50] and of children in care in the province, 90 percent are Indigenous. Indigenous children involved in the child welfare system fare poorly compared with Indigenous children who are not. They are over five times more likely to be charged with a crime than those who had never had any contact with child welfare systems.[51] Only 33 percent of them complete high school as compared with 89 percent of other Manitoba children[52] and are thus more likely to wind up in jail

47 CBC Radio News 07/03/09 cited in Matthews, *Naamiwan's Drum*, 2016, p. 147.

48 First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada v Canada (AG), 2019 CHRT 39 at para 193.

49 Nico Trocmé, Bruce MacLaurin, Barbara Fallon, Della Knoke, Lisa Pitman, Megan McCormack, *Mesumimk Wasatek: Catching a Drop of Light: Understanding the Overrepresentation of First Nations Children in Canada's Child Welfare System: An Analysis of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (CIS-2003), Toronto, Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, 2006.

50 The consequences of this pattern of social disruption among First Nations in Manitoba has been documented using the Manitoba Population Data Repository, a cross institutional database that enables scholars to compare and analyze health and social outcomes for Indigenous people in the province.

51 Cross-Over Kids: http://mchp-appserv.cpe.umanitoba.ca/reference/MCHP_JustCare_Report_web.pdf

52 The Educational Outcomes of Children in Care in Manitoba: http://mchp-appserv.cpe.umanitoba.ca/reference/CIC_report_web.pdf. See also Tait

than complete high school. These negative outcomes are examples of «path dependency»,[53] whereby government policies establish narrow choices for vulnerable families, and rather than addressing root causes create institutional traps which deny personal agency.

As a conclusion

The women we have talked to think that there is a better way, and it will be found by Indigenous women, who have the wisdom to see the value in old ideas and the potential in the new. The stories of Margaret, Annette, Anaak, and Pinay offer both a narrative and a comparative perspective on Indigenous women in motion, following in the footsteps of others and taking lessons learned to venture on new paths and trajectories. Margaret holds a Master's degree in education, has been a very successful teacher, principal, and education manager, and was the head of an economically self-sufficient household of four children for most of her adult life. In this she is typical.[54] The scope of women's responsibilities, glimpsed in Hallowell's work and in our interview here shows that women were caring for children, feeding and clothing the family, and making the many items necessary for life in the bush or beautiful enough to sell to support the family. Those competencies mapped well over the kinds of jobs and careers available in the 20th century both in remote communities and in the city, as child carers, teachers, nurses, and artists. Men's competencies, hunting and survival skills and the managing of relationships with the *bawaaganag*, the dream spirits that facilitate hunting and all else in the bush, were undermined by welfare, schools, and the collapse of the fur trade economy. The fact that Indigenous women in Manitoba are likely to be single parents supporting families is a symptom of this disparity but nevertheless, women's responsibilities rest on an understanding that they are still doing the work of a traditional Anishinaabekwe (Anishinaabe woman).

and Stafanick, *Crisis in Care*, and Myra Tait and Lorna Stefanick, *Sutructural Racism and Sexism in Settler Sociaties: Families at the Confluence of Colonialism and Neoliberalism* (forthcoming).

53 James Mahoney, Daniel Schensul [2006-03-16], *Historical Context and Path Dependence*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 454-471. doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270439.003.0024.

54 Twenty nine percent of Indigenous children under the age of 5 live in female led single parent households. Statistics Canada (2017) Census in Brief: Diverse family characteristics of Aboriginal children aged 0 to 4 https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016020/98-200-x2016020-eng.cfm

In 1993/4, Margaret and MM worked together on two documentaries about Anishinaabe ideas about Thunderbirds, *Binesiwag*, the giant birds responsible for storms and lightning who will help you in life but whom you must acknowledge when they visit. Her thoughtful remarks sum up her way of holding her traditional knowledge, while incorporating the new world brought by teachers, nurses and others:

> Last summer was the first time that I did not think of the scientific world. Last summer was the first time that I was not afraid of lightning because I knew the meaning of them, and I knew how to respect them and I knew what to do.
>
> There was a horrible storm, last summer at the beach. The power even went out. And my poor grandchildren were petrified; they were screaming and yelling. It was bright, pink, orange, green, that sort of storm. The whole cloud and lightning all over the place; loud crashes and everybody started to have fear. And I went to the window, opened the window, without thinking scientifically. You are not supposed to do that. But I went to the window and they said, «Mom, what are you doing»?
> I said, «Well you guys we didn't offer tobacco to our grandfather's», I says, «that's what they want». I said. «They'll leave us once we give our respects to them and give them tobacco». I said, «I'm going to share my cigarettes with them and I'm going to leave tobacco here». And I said that they will go past, we'll hear them rolling by.
> So, I proceeded to do that. Not once did I think about the scientific explanation of hot and cold air…
> MM – Did it work?
> MS – Yes. I think they boomed loudly once, then you could hear them going by and the lights came back on. My culture took over. Yes. It is what I believe, not what I was taught in school, but what I believe. You see I guess it has made me a stronger person. I can walk on both sides of the street now.[55]

55 Margaret Simmons interview recorded by Matthews, 1995.

Abstract: Questo saggio crea una conversazione tra le storie di vita delle donne anishinaabe e un ampio database della provincia canadese del Manitoba, soffermandosi sulle relazioni fra reddito, istruzione e condizioni di salute, come pure sui rapporti con i servizi sociali e le istituzioni che amministrano legge e giustizia. Si guarda ai ruoli rivestiti dalle donne nell'affrontare, a partire da metà Novecento, la transizione da uno stile di vita legato all'agricoltura e al commercio delle pelli, verso posizioni di capofamiglia nel Manitoba contemporaneo. Le storie e i dati offrono una narrazione e, insieme, una prospettiva comparata sulle donne indigene viste in movimento, sulle tracce di altre e di altri, ad avventurarsi su nuovi sentieri e traiettorie inedite. Il concetto di *limes* apre una via utile per discutere le transizioni storiche e quelle odierne, e per indagare come le donne abbiano risposto alle occasioni emerse nel quadro di un contesto politico coloniale e sovente oppressivo. Dal punto di vista metodologico, si è attuata una co-creazione fra studiose anishinaabe e studiose di ceppo coloniale. Il metodo è stato applicato entro uno spazio biculturale ove idee configurate ed espresse in anishinaabemowin (cioè nella lingua degli anishinaabe) vengono presentate nella lingua e formano la base dell'interpretazione. Così il saggio esplora il concetto di una collocazione fra due mondi e fra due o più culture e lingue, ma elabora delle risposte alla condizione di transizione usando i termini delle donne anishinaabe.

This paper brings the stories of Anishinaabe women's lives into conversation with a remarkably comprehensive Manitoba database that looks at the relationships between income, education, and health status, as well as engagement with social services, justice, and law enforcement institutions in the province. It considers the roles of women in navigating a transition from a rural/fur trade lifestyle in the mid-20th century to roles as heads of households in contemporary Manitoba. The stories and data offer both a narrative and a comparative perspective on Indigenous women in motion, following in the footsteps of others and taking lessons learned to venture on new paths and trajectories. *Limes* seems to be a useful way of talking about historical and contemporary transitions and exploring the way that women respond to opportunities that emerge within a colonial and often oppressive political environment. The approach taken here is one of co-creation between Anishinaabe women scholars and settler scholars. It is also undertaken in a bicultural space, where ideas formed and articulated in Anishinaabemowin (the Anishinaabe language) are presented in the language and form the bedrock of interpretation. In this way the paper explores the idea of being poised between two worlds or two or more cultures and languages and formulates responses to the condition of transition in Anishinaabe women's terms.

Keywords: Anishinaabe della provincia del Manitoba, Canada, conversazioni fra donne, database del Manitoba, First Nations, Manitoba, Convitti Indiani (IRS), transizione coloniale e postcoloniale; Anishinaabe population in Manitoba, Canada, colonial and postcolonial transitions, conversations among women, database from Manitoba, First Nations, Indian Residential Schools (IRS), Manitoba.

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Margaret Simmons è un'insegnante Anishinaabekwe di Berens River Manitoba, Canada, con una laurea magistrale in *Scienze della formazione*. Attualmente a riposo, era in servizio presso il Southeast Tribal Council (Consiglio Tribale del Sudest) con funzioni di sostegno e consulenza alle scuole del Pauingassi e di Little Grand Rapids. Margaret è un'eccellente oratrice in lingua anishinaabemowin ed ha collaborato con Maureen Matthews sin dal 1992 alla produzione di documentari radiofonici: Il suo progetto più recente è un libro bilingue, in inglese e anishinaabemowin, che verte sul Trattato N.5 firmato da suo bisnonno Jacob Berens (margaretjsimmons@hotmail.com).

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