

## LISTENING FOR THE TEACHINGS: INDIGENIST POETIC INQUIRY AS RELATIONAL METHODOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT.** This article introduces Indigenist poetic inquiry, an arts-based research method grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. As a Muskego Inninuwak re-researcher, I share how poetic and relational practices guided knowledge gathering with Indigenous full-spectrum doulas who view birth work as Indigenous resurgence. Grounded in an Indigenist paradigm, this approach honors reciprocity, interconnectedness, and ceremony. Through storytelling, journaling, and reflection, I created “teaching” and “learning” poems that evoke *môsihtâwin* (insight) and *nistohtamowin* (deep understanding). Indigenist poetic inquiry weaves story, spirit, and relationship into re-research, positioning meaning-making itself as a transformative act of resurgence.

*Keywords.* Birth worker; doula; maternal health; culturally-appropriate care; poetic inquiry

### 1. POSITIONALITY STATEMENT

Gladys Rowe (she/her): I am a Muskego Inninew (Swampy Cree) scholar, practitioner, and storyteller and member of Fox Lake Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba. I also carry ancestry from Ireland, England, Norway, and Ukraine, and I hold these lineages with an awareness of the responsibilities and learnings they offer me. I live on the lands of the Duwamish and Suquamish Nations in the Pacific Northwest. My work in Indigenous evaluation, research, and storytelling is shaped by long-standing relationships with Indigenous communities across Turtle Island and a commitment to relational, decolonial, and arts-based approaches to knowledge gathering, production, and mobilization.

My practice is grounded in Indigenous methodologies and guided by teachings of relational accountability, reciprocity, and respect. I understand evaluation and research as relational and political processes rather than neutral or technical ones, and I work to center story, lived experience, and community knowledges as pathways for resurgence. I approach this work as a respectful guest, accountable

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*Date:* Received: October 16, 2025

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to the communities, knowledge systems, and relationships that make this work possible

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This article introduces and articulates Indigenist poetic inquiry, an emergent methodology developed through my dissertation, *Resurgence of Indigenous Nationhood: Centering the Stories of Indigenous Full-Spectrum Doulas* (Rowe, 2020). While the stories of Indigenous full-spectrum doulas provided the relational ground from which this work emerged, the central focus of this article is the methodological framework that grew from that journey: Indigenist poetic inquiry. This article contributes to Indigenous methodologies by articulating Indigenist poetic inquiry as a distinct framework grounded in resurgence, ceremony, relational accountability, and poetic transformation. Developed from my own transformation as a re-researcher committed to Indigenous resurgence, this methodological innovation is a relational, arts-based, ceremony-informed approach to meaning-making grounded in Indigenist paradigms and Indigenous poetics.

This article investigates the following questions: How can poetic practice operate as a relational methodology? What does it mean to interpret relational data through ceremony, reflection, and poetic form? How might poetry serve as both method and outcome in Indigenist research paradigms? Poetry serves as a significant mechanism for interpretation, reflection, meaning-making, reciprocity, and storytelling. Through Indigenist poetic inquiry, poetry becomes a site of relational accountability and a practice of resurgence. My scholarly contribution lies in formally articulating Indigenist poetic inquiry as a methodological framework that integrates Indigenous paradigms, relational design, Cree poetics, ceremony, reflective journaling, and collaborative poetic transformation into a coherent interpretive practice.

Guided by a Muskego Inninuwak (Swampy Cree) worldview, Indigenist paradigms, and relational methodology, this article positions Indigenist poetic inquiry as a method for making meaning and sharing story. My intentions are to present guiding lights along a pathway for other re-researchers—a pathway that is neither linear nor fixed but continually emerging and evolving through relationship and reflection. While poetic inquiry has been widely used in qualitative research, Indigenist poetic inquiry differs in three important ways: it is grounded explicitly in an Indigenist paradigm; it treats ceremony, intuition, and relational accountability as critical methodological processes, and it positions poetic transformation as an act towards and of resurgence. These distinctions are crucial because the mere incorporation of poetry does not make research Indigenist. Rather, Indigenist poetic inquiry emerges from worldview, land, language, and relational ethics. In practice, it involves relational conversations, ceremonial preparation, reflective journaling, institutive sensemaking (môsihtâwin), poetic transformation of story, and participant review. It is both a method of interpretation and a resurgence practice, one that transforms the re-researcher alongside the stories. The poem that follows reflects internal dialogue, relationality, and ceremonial preparations that

shaped my interpretive process. For Indigenist poetic inquiry, reflexive poetry offers both the documentation and markers of method.

**As I am overwhelmed with the enormity  
of the task before me**

I ask myself so many questions  
Checking and rechecking  
My ability to be in relation  
Act with intention  
Hold sacred the stories of this work.

I ask myself in so many ways  
Reflecting and re-assessing  
My choice in the methods  
Gather with gratitude  
Give more than I ask for.

I ask myself to keep moving  
Searching and re-searching  
Through stumbles and detours  
Share with humility  
Represent the bundle that is this work.

I remind myself to listen  
I ask the eagles  
I ask the evergreens  
I ask the water and moon  
I ask the sage, sweetgrass, cedar, and tobacco  
I ask the teachings to come, I will listen.

– GR, March 28, 2020

This poem offers methodological self-reflections on knowledge gathering and begins to share pieces of my story. The guiding principle of this inquiry is the Cree concept *kakinow ni wagamakanak*, meaning “the degree to which we are all related.” In interpretation and meaning-making, relationality is central—it requires acknowledging and maintaining accountability to all my relations while making transparent the motivations and connections among the search for knowledge, its importance, its methods, its re-searchers, and its uses.

Following the guidance of Indigenous scholars (Absolon, 2011; Absolon & Willett, 2005; Wilson, 2008), I begin by introducing who I am, where I come from, and why this re-search is meaningful to me. Like other Indigenous researchers (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2010; Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2008), my motives and purposes are deeply personal. I am in relation to the search I undertake, and that relationship shapes every decision and action. I must demonstrate that I am capable of attending to the spirit of the work and accountable to the kin

and knowledge holders with whom I collaborate. My motives are rooted in the intention to shift the trajectory of future generations through resurgence—to nurture groundedness in community, identity, and belonging. This intention is inseparable from my own transformative journey with those same teachings.

I hope the connective threads woven between experience, worldview, methods, community, story, and poetry will strengthen the larger web of Indigenous resurgence. And so, with this poem, I begin by sharing pieces of my own story. My name is Gladys Lorene Rowe I am Muskego Inninew and a member of Fox Lake Cree Nation in Manitoba. I also hold relations with ancestors from Norway, Ukraine, England, and Ireland. The influence of these ancestries within my identity is not equal. When I say I am Muskego Inninew, I name the central role that being Muskego Inninew holds in who I am. My dissertation emerged from a deep heart space. My story of Indigenous resurgence includes the reclamation of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing related to reproductive justice, pregnancy, birth, babies, and parenting. It includes using my knowledge and gifts to support others walking similar paths and amplifying stories so that, together, we can remember who we are, where we come from, and what our purpose is in this life's journey. Training as an Indigenous full-spectrum doula alongside Indigenous leaders allowed me to confront how my own birth experiences had lacked ceremonial, spiritual, and practical supports. It also connected my personal experiences with Muskego Inninew teachings, deepening my understanding of what this means in my role as a matriarch in my family. I am a mother, sister, auntie, partner, and kin to many. These are roles I carry with deep intention and responsibility. Locating myself in this way makes me visible and accountable; it offers readers context for assessing the credibility and grounding of my work (Absolon & Willett, 2005).

I also want to pause and reflect on how I have come to understand myself in relation to the term research. It is a heavily weighted and deeply colonial word, carrying histories of power and harm between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Hart & Rowe, 2014; Sinclair et al., 2009; Smith, 2013). I entered the academy aspiring to be a re-searcher, instructor, and scholar with a desire to contribute to something different: Indigenous resurgence. Anishinaabe scholar Kathy Absolon (2011) uses the hyphenated term re-search to describe a process of “looking again” to gather or recreate knowledge. This framing resonates deeply with me. Re-search is not linear or extractive; it is relational, iterative, and lived with heart, spirit, and responsibility. It calls us to bring our whole selves, our experiences, gifts, and relations into the work (Absolon, 2011; Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2008). In this sense, re-search becomes an act of resistance and resurgence, through which Indigenous peoples “re-write and re-story ourselves” (Absolon, 2011, p. 21) while remaining accountable to the communities, lands, and teachings that shape us.

In the following sections, as I demonstrate the work of Indigenist poetic inquiry, the poems act as gifts and reciprocities. These are offerings of reflection

and transformation and reveal how time spent learning from Indigenous doulas has shaped me, bringing healing, insight, and growth.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

**3.1. Indigenist Paradigms and Relational Knowledge Gathering.** In the spirit of Cree scholar Michael Hart (2009), my understanding of an Indigenist paradigm is that Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing provide me with the knowledge, skills, and vision to prioritize Indigenous experiences and truths. The very air I breathe is an Indigenist paradigm (Absolon, 2011; Hart, 2009; Rigney, 1999; Wilson, 2007, 2008). Absolon (2011) describes an Indigenist paradigm as the convergence of the past, present, and future where, in the search for truth and freedom, we return to our roots to reconnect with the dignity and humanity that Creation intended. In Indigenist philosophy, ideas, data, and experiences are not “discovered”—rather we learn more by entering into relationship with them. Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2013) asserts that “the unit of analysis is the relationship not the individual” (p. 314).

*Indigenous* is not a synonym for *Indigenist*. Wilson (2007) cautions that simply having Indigenous researchers or incorporating an Indigenous method does not make a project Indigenist. Narunnga descendant Lester Rigney (1999) indicates there are three core principles of Indigenist research: resistance as an emancipatory imperative, political integrity, and the privileging of Indigenous voices. Indigenist re-searchers remain aware of and committed to cultural, social, and political differences and accountable to the diverse nations with which they work. An Indigenist paradigm holds a core belief that Indigenous people’s knowledges, experiences, and interests are central to Indigenous methodologies and any research undertaken (Rigney, 1999).

**3.2. Indigenous Worldviews.** A worldview is an embedded system of values and beliefs influenced by socialization and social interactions over a person’s lifetime (Olsen et al., 1992). Noonuccal researcher Karen Martin-Booran Mirraboopa (2003) outlines her Quandamooka ontology and epistemology and the orientation this worldview provides in her search for knowledge. *Ways of being* are how we exist in a network of relations and uphold these relations through reciprocity and responsibility. *Ways of doing* are the synthesis of and enact *ways of knowing* and *being* through language, art, ceremonies, and social organization (Martin-Booran Mirraboopa, 2003). Though my Indigenist context differs greatly from Martin-Booran Mirraboopa’s, I re-search and write from a shared commitment that intentionally centres Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, stories, and scholars.

My Muskego Inninuwak worldview informs how I see the world around me, how I hold my responsibilities close, and how I interact in relation with all beings. This worldview is held and informed by my relations with the northern boreal forests and lands of Treaty 5 in Manitoba where the powerful waterways of the Nelson, Kettle, and Hayes rivers flow together to the mouth of the Hudson Bay. I am influenced by the stories and teachings of the Elders in my community

who share what it means to be in good relation and show up in a good way for one another. Indigenous worldviews, ontologies, and epistemologies are vital ingredients in Indigenist re-search. Indigenous methodologies, or our ways of *being and doing*, are rooted in Indigenous worldviews and philosophies. These are then enacted through ethics and principles in the research (Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009, Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008). Absolon (2011) imagines a holistic and circular worldview as comprised of spirit, heart, mind, and body. *Ways of knowing* therefore include connecting the dots between one's worldview and methodology (Absolon, 2011; Absolon & Willett, 2005; Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2001). An Indigenous approach informed by my worldview is necessary in this re-search, which invites other Indigenous peoples and cultures to participate.

As Absolon (2011) articulates, there is no formula for Indigenous methodologies; they are, and must be, grounded in Indigenous worldviews and the lands from which they were born. Simpson (2011) also asserts that Indigenous knowledges depend on the geography, flora and fauna, the relationships between beings, and the resulting language system. Furthermore, an Indigenous worldview is embodied, lived, and dependent on individual experiences. This means finding understanding within ourselves by reflecting on how we do things and how we walk in this world and results in multiple truths (Simpson, 2000).

**3.3. Indigenous Ways of Knowing.** Indigenous knowledges are communicated through (but not limited to) oral transmission, are experiential, and are holistic. They incorporate multiple ways of knowing and learning (Absolon, 2011; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant-Castellano (2000) describes ways of knowing as rooted in subjective experiences, which are the sum of the relationships that individuals bring. This means that there is no single correct "truth"; instead, personal experience is an individual's truth. In Cree, this concept is held in the word *tâpwîwin*, "the truth in so far as it may be known" (Napoleon, 2014, p. 115). Other nations express a similar understanding. Personal truths are gathered together, contextualized in sets of relationships, and shared with a broader purpose of building knowledge. The formation of personal and collective knowledge occurs when inner knowing is reviewed in community to confirm a shared understanding of how this knowledge fits within broader cultural knowledge and practices. Through a process of communal social validations and collective consensus building, personal knowledge can become wisdom (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

The use of an Indigenist paradigm informed by a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) worldview in this re-search includes ceremony, "where the critical role of inner knowing and dreams as catalyst activities support ways of knowing" (Rowe, 2014, p. 2). Preparation to engage in re-search is a purposeful practice that includes cultural protocols. Offering tobacco and prayers and smudging with cedar, sage, and sweetgrass cleansed and prepared my mind, body, and spirit to engage in each step of the re-search. Other protocols I used for this work were asking ancestors for guidance. I prepared a sacred feast to ask the grandmothers and grandfathers to guide the work. The feast was shared by my family as I prepared

to send my proposal to my committee. I made an offering plate and took it to a stand of cedars on a trail near my home that I visit frequently. I placed tobacco and asked for support to complete this dissertation journey and represent the stories shared in a good way.

We are in connection with spiritual or ceremonial happenings in which subjective experience becomes knowledge. Inward reflection is a valuable process in this methodology, with dreams, ceremony, meditation, and prayer accessing inner spaces. According to Absolon (2011), “knowledge also comes from dreams, visions, ceremonies, and prayer. It is knowledge that we search for and gather” (p. 60). Such inner spaces make the unknown known (Ermine, 1995) and the invisible visible: “Indigenous forms of knowledge production accept intuitive knowledge and metaphysical and unconscious realms as possible channels to knowing” (Absolon, 2011, p. 31). Again, the method is inherently tentative and iterative; Absolon (2011) observes that “organic methodology emerges as we attune ourselves to our search process. When we listen to our inner knowing, our dreams, the signs around us and our intuition, we become attuned to possibilities that enable an organic process to emerge” (p. 87). Cree scholar Willie Ermine (1995) describes the experience of coming to inner knowing as *mamâhtâwisiwin*, a process I develop further below.

**3.4. Poetry in Arts-Based Research.** *Poetics* (as well as poetic inquiry) may include poetry, storytelling, journaling, creative nonfiction, interpretation, and more. In other words, it is less a specific genre of the written word and more of an approach to communication. Nevertheless, this paper focuses briefly on poetry’s special role in qualitative research methodologies, where for decades it has served the purposes of knowledge acquisition, knowledge dissemination, and the presentation of findings. One reason for its popularity is that narratives that people share about their lived experiences fit naturally into the structure of poetry (Furman, 2003; Leavy, 2009; Poindexter, 2002; Prendergast, 2009, Richardson, 1993). Moreover, poetry as a craft shares structures, processes, and intentions that align with qualitative methodologies.

Leavy (2009) asserts that poetry allows the researcher “to evoke different meanings from the data, work through a different set of issues, and help the audience receive the data differently” (p.64). What is the nature of this difference? Poetry offers a multidimensional, interdisciplinary, and insightful mechanism for challenging structures of research in the social sciences (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2008; Leavy, 2009). Poetic inquiry can be a socio-political act of resistance, addressing voice and perspective and the principles of representation. For instance, Saunders et al. (2015) use poetic inquiry to understand and make visible experiences of Aboriginal mental health in Australia; Voice and representation are key to writing *for* Aboriginal recovery rather than *about* it. Poetry carries an understanding that the re-searcher and reader become active participants in relation to what is and is not on the page. Listening takes place in the context of our worldviews. We hear and place meaning on the words, the enunciations, and the silences to come to spaces of knowing (Saunders et al., 2015).

Poetry and by extension poetics are also different because they can engage with the heart and other spaces of feeling; they provide the opportunity to elicit empathy and create understanding. Through metaphor, lyric, rhythm, imagery, emotion, and self-revelation, poetic inquiry can serve as a way of knowing in the research process (Prendergast, 2009). Leavy (2009) expands on the multi-sensory experience of poetry:

Poems use words, rhythm, and space to create sensory scenes where meaning emerges from the careful construction of both language and silences. In this way, a poem can be understood as evoking a snippet of human experience that is artistically expressed as in a heightened state. (p. 64)

This experience is particularly well aligned with Indigenist and relational methodologies in that they are also holistic, embodied, and attend to multiple ways of knowing. The use of poems offers researchers the opportunity to be attentive to multiple meanings, make visible identity work by locating self within the relational space, and layered perspectives founded on the subjectivity of human experience (Leavy, 2009).

**3.5. Making Space for Storytelling and Stories.** I turn now to emphasizing the critical ontological role of story in an Indigenist poetic inquiry. As I have indicated, critical poetics can include genres other than poetry, and oral storytelling belongs in this framework. The properties of stories make them a powerful mechanism through which to learn more about the work of Indigenous doulas and Indigenous resurgence. Stó:lo scholar Joanne Archibald (2008) shares her methodology of Indigenous storywork, where stories are interpreted through the lens of both teller and listener, and respectful, trusting relationships create a safe space for stories. After other Indigenous scholars (Archibald, 2008; Cariou, 2016; Kovach, 2009; McLeod, 2007), I understand stories to be a relational *way of doing* that privileges the voice and prioritizes experiences of the Indigenous people from whom I seek to learn; they are means of understanding more about our experiences (Absolon, 2011; Archibald, 2008; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Kovach, 2009). Traditionally, stories have been used to share and teach Indigenous knowledges (Brant-Castellano, 2000). Indigenous storytellers use their personal life experiences, like traditional stories, as teaching stories.

Indigenous storywork methods are less structured, more conversational, and typically require the re-searcher to listen more than traditional Western methods. Truth is neither external nor passively waiting to be discovered; rather, truth is informed through the relationships that we engage (Kovach, 2009). Storytelling is fluid and flexible, with narratives tending towards open-endedness, and the storyteller emphasizing different aspects of a story to match the purpose, audience, and the relationship between storyteller and listener (Brant-Castellano, 2000; Weber-Pillwax, 2001). Furthermore, interpretations of stories are limitless, as listeners bring their own knowledge sets and contexts to story (McLeod, 2007). Stories can support Indigenous resurgence through a process of remembering, visioning, and creating. Cree scholar Neal McLeod (2007) describes stories as a mechanism

for the transmission of memory and history. Absolon (2011) eloquently describes the purpose and power of stories in re-search:

Indigenous searchers talk about storytelling as a methodology to help our people tell their stories so they can leave their mark. These stories help us to not get lost. We build on our stories and each other's stories, and eventually our stories weave together as we share them. (p. 137)

According to McLeod (2007), we can assess and reflect on the relationship that we have with these collective stories; through this weaving, we create collective memories. Yet stories are also technology allowing us to dream and implement an Indigenous future (Cariou, 2016; McLeod, 2007). Métis scholar Warren Cariou (2016) explains why story- and life-telling are vital to Indigenous sovereignty: "first because the storyteller's act of telling the story is an affirmation of the continued value of Indigenous oral forms of knowledge, and second because the continued life of the story depends upon members of the community to do the work of remembering" (p. 315). In the context of Indigenist poetics, stories are "reservoirs of sovereignty" (Cariou, 2016) that strengthen us as individuals and nations in relationship with the world around us.

#### 4. EMERGENCE OF INDIGENIST POETIC INQUIRY

##### **A Thread of Relations: Once I was a spark**

When I was little, I didn't think much about relations  
There were loads of people though  
Loving me.

I can hear joy  
Smiles punctuated by laugh lines  
Children bring a spark  
My children bring a spark  
Once I was that spark.

I don't know when I transitioned  
From not a second thought  
To being consumed  
Tracing back  
Moments and actions  
Movements and choices

Presence and absence.

Decades stitch forward  
Glancing backwards to collect threads  
In genealogy and pictures  
Stories and reminiscences  
Rooted memory

Blurry edges  
Aching lost opportunities

Luminescent threads  
Dance  
Catch the air  
Flow softly  
Find strength in one another

My ancestors  
Sit with me at my desk  
writing this work  
A blanket draped on my shoulders  
A soft kiss on my cheek

Forever my spark  
*I will always be a spark.*

– GR, March 28, 2020

For this article, I foreground the relational elements that shaped the emergence of Indigenist poetic inquiry. This methodology developed through practices of accountability, ceremony, and transformation. To uphold relational accountability, I convened an advisory circle of Indigenous birth work leaders and knowledge holders—Melissa Brown, Camie Goldhammer, and Candace Neumann—whose guidance informed not only the research questions and protocols but also the ethical and spiritual orientation of the work. Their presence created a reflective space where I could pause, listen, and interpret in a way aligned with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

The inquiry was guided by a single question that was approached relationally: How does Indigenous birth work enact resurgence? The aim was not to generalize across participants but to listen deeply to the specificity of each story and to understand how teachings rooted in land, language, and community are carried through practices of everyday care. Participants were Indigenous full-spectrum doulas offering culturally grounded birth care across Turtle Island. Recruitment occurred relationally, through community networks and trusted leaders (Patton, 2002). Invitations were extended in ways that aligned with protocol and reciprocity; they emphasized shared responsibility, and those who felt called to participate entered into an ongoing relationship of reflection and care. Across these elements, relationship was the method. Accountability, reciprocity, and story shape how knowledge was gathered, interpreted, and returned. This relational foundation, supported through Indigenist poetic inquiry, allowed the re-search to advance in a good way: responsive to the teachings shared and attentive to the transformation offering within and between us.

## 5. RELATIONAL KNOWLEDGE GATHERING

In Indigenist poetic inquiry, knowledge gathering is relational. Conversations with Indigenous full-spectrum doulas were guided by care, reflection, and reciprocity. Participants chose how, when, and where they wished to connect, and each exchange included cultural protocol and respect for each person's rhythms and responsibilities. Prior to meeting, participants were invited to reflect on prompts to consider, such as how they came to their journeys in birth work, what cultural practices they carried, and how they saw doula work contributing to community strength, nationhood, and resurgence.

Conversations were participant-led and story-based (Kovach, 2010), creating space for each person to situate themselves as a knowledge holder. My role was to listen deeply, to respond intuitively, and to remain accountable to the spirit of what was shared. Due to the constraints and early restrictions of COVID-19, our meetings took place remotely; I learned to listen differently and to attend to tone, pauses, and breath when visual cues were absent and to notice subtleties of gesture and energy when we met on video. Whether through screen or phone, the depth of connection depended on my attention to these relational cues, my awareness of time and energy, and my willingness to pause when stories needed rest. Some conversations continued over multiple visits, allowing insights to unfold organically. These exchanges became ceremonies of connection where story and spirit intertwined. In this way, relational knowledge gathering became a core methodological practice of Indigenist poetic inquiry.

## 6. POETIC TRANSFORMATION AS RESURGENCE PRACTICE

### **Hold on, softly**

In this moment the idea of resurgence seems even more poignant.  
 What values will I live?  
 How will I be in relation with the gifts that have been offered to  
 me?  
 There are many questions that come forward.  
 I hear the voices, each intonation, laugh, pause, and silence.  
 I hear the breath of the story.  
 I hear the offering that has been made.  
 To take these offerings with intention.  
 To hold them in a way that allows the hope and the vision to grow.  
 To hold them in a way that is gentle. Is kind.

The translation of these conversations onto the page is an enormity  
 that I sit with.  
 To hold the spirit of each in the relation within which it took place.  
 The heart, the hope, the emotion.  
 Orbs of bright light, sitting softly on the ground in front of me.  
 They radiate, the energy emanating from the teachings held within  
 them pulses like a

heartbeat.  
 Welcoming me to come forward, soft grasses embracing me to sit,  
 and to cradle them in my hands.  
 To create a space of intention and joy, of curiosity and hope.  
 To embrace the gift that this time has created for me.

– GR, March 16, 2020

**6.1. Indigenist poetic inquiry.** While scholars and community leaders have been using poetic inquiry in qualitative arts-based research for several decades, Indigenist poetic inquiry as a way of knowing and doing in Indigenist research is an emerging methodology. I am drawn to other Indigenous experiences and yearn to hear deeply resonant voices through diverse media. Indigenous poetics as a means through which Indigenous peoples can recognize themselves is invaluable (Cariou, 2015). I use Indigenist poetic inquiry to share the teachings held within the stories of the re-search participants and what I learned in receiving the gifts of these stories. The following section provides an overview of Indigenous poetics, broadly highlighting key areas for consideration.

**6.2. Indigenous poetics.** In the research design, I outlined Indigenist poetic inquiry as the mechanism I would use to present the teachings, learnings, and reflections gathered in this project through two arts-based methods: journaling and poetry. I have since realized the ways in which a sensibility attuned to Indigenous poetics affected every stage of the project. In Indigenist poetics, there is significant alignment between an Indigenist paradigm and the Indigenous and Cree poetics discussed by Cariou (2015) and McLeod (2015), including prioritizing participants’ voices and lived experience, exercising control over the story that is being told, and understanding poetry as an act of resistance (Prendergast, 2009). Cariou (2015) examines the place and space of Indigenous poetics within the broader landscape of poetry, where limitations can often include restrictive colonial categorizations and stereotypes. Indigenous poetics, however, can catalyze destabilization and transformation, cracking open the boundaries that maintain the marginalization of Indigenous peoples, allowing a re-formation of what is expected. Indigenous poetics can “decolonize the imagination by bridging the ideological boundaries that often separate the beneficiaries of colonialism from those who are objectified or impoverished by it” (Cariou, 2015, p. 32). Indigenous poetics thereby consciously challenges and changes the story, enacting a narrative of referential self-determination.

McLeod (2015) takes Indigenous poetics to specifically Cree contexts (2015); for him, *thinking poetically* is a state where Indigenous storytellers have freedom of expression and capacity to move “away from the epistemological straitjacket and the colonial box that the social sciences have often placed on Indigenous narratives” (p. 89). Cree poetics is the space to recreate relations with land and ancestors and is directly linked to “mamâhtâwisiwin, the process of tapping into

the Great Mystery, which in turn is mediated by historicity and wâhkôtowin (kinship)” (McLeod, 2015, p. 89). Cree poetics connects contemporary storytellers and poets to the generations that have gone before by grounding itself in the cultural and linguistic remembering held in the narratives of our people. Plains Cree and Barbadian scholar Tasha Beeds (2015) also makes connections between land and poetry: “Within a nêhiyaw understanding, stories and, by extension, poetry emerge out of and fall back to the land. The land gives birth to story and reclaims its people in the process” (p. 61).

The connection of Cree poetics to land and ancestors introduces an ethical obligation—a responsibility to remember, to speak with care, and to honour the places from which stories arise (McLeod, 2015). As an action-based way of relating to the world, Cree and Indigenous poetics expresses relationship not only among people but within and between ideas, places, and beings. This understanding reminds us that meaning is not fixed in words alone but lives dynamically in relation to land, to language, and to spirit. Like traditional and contemporary storywork, poetic creation is an act of relational making, an act that sustains our connections, shapes identity, and reaffirms belonging. Through these poetic practices, Indigenous peoples express continuities of spirit and imagination that move beyond boundaries of class, race, and epistemology. Poetry becomes both language and land, both remembrance and resurgence.

**6.3. Making meaning: applying Indigenist poetic inquiry.** In making meaning, I followed the core principles of Indigenist research outlined by Rigney (1999): emphasizing Indigenous full-spectrum doulas’ lived experiences and truths, asserting their self-determination towards cultural freedom, and affirming the critical role of Indigenous peoples as producers of Indigenous knowledges. I chose an interpretive rather than analytical approach, seeking understanding through reflection rather than reduction. As Kovach (2010) notes, analytical methods often strip stories from their contexts, whereas interpretive approaches honour the wholeness and interconnection of Indigenous experience. Preparation for this stage resembled earlier ceremonial moments in the re-search journey. I offered tobacco, spent time among the evergreens near water, meditated, and smudged with sage, sweetgrass, and cedar, creating a space of intention and mamâhtâwisiwin, a deep contemplation guided by spirit. I considered several questions:

- What lessons have I learned from the stories shared?
- What connections emerge across the experiences of Indigenous full-spectrum doulas?
- What teachings reveal how their work enacts Indigenous resurgence?

Each step reflected Indigenist priorities of reciprocity and accountability. Following Kovach (2009), I invited participants to review their condensed transcripts and to edit, clarify, or remove any material before moving forward. When the collection of stories grew beyond 150 pages in total, I consulted my advisory committee and decided to hold the complete transcripts as a bundle preserved in the appendix so readers could engage the teachings in their fullness while the body of the work contained select expressions. As I reflected in my journal, I came to

see this structure as the phases of the moon, with each stage revealing part of a greater whole, the stories always present, resting, and luminous in their own cycles of light:

The moon enamors me constantly. I always look for her in the sky—at night and in the morning. To acknowledge her and thank her for the gifts that she brings in the darkness. When I received my name I was told that my energy and power comes from the night, from the darkness. And the moon is connected to the work that I need to do in this lifetime. I think of those words often as the moon goes through her phases, each month of full, bright, intense glow to a sliver that offers a glimmer of light in the deep and dark sky. The phases teach me that there is always growth and there is always stillness. There is a time for all of the work that I need to do in caring for myself and my community. And at different phases each requires different energy, focus, and action. We can be still and we can emerge. All of these are beautiful and all of these are still the moon in its entirety. No matter what phase she is in, she is still there. Completely. She is whole even when we cannot see her wholeness. I need to trust that even though I cannot see the entirety of her glow this morning. I know that the dark pieces, the ones that are not reflecting the light today are still there, but are resting. (Personal Reflection, March 17, 2020)

The moon in its entirety is the bundle of stories; they do not disappear. They are there, resting, waiting to be revealed when the timing of the cycle aligns. The next step was to shape these shared stories into poetic form. I listened to participant-approved transcripts and attended to *môsihtâwin*, which are those intuitive moments of recognition when meaning rises to the surface. Guided by that sense, I highlighted words and phrases that carried teachings or emotional resonance, arranging them into free-verse “teaching poems.” These poems, like all expressions in the dissertation, were reviewed and approved by participants before inclusion. I then wrote “learning poems,” my own reflective pieces that embodied the knowledge and transformation I experienced through the process.

The other part of retelling the stories involved curating and creating versions of participant stories for the body of the dissertation. In other words, my re-search was driven by data in poems I “found” in the interview transcripts. During this stage, I sat with the participants’ stories and paid attention to *môsihtâwin* – a “gut feeling” where I become “suddenly aware of something through the use of all senses” (Napoleon, 2013, p. 9). More colloquially, I call this an “aha!” moment. I listened to and read the participant-approved transcript, finding and highlighting words, phrases, or sentences that synthesized meaning and reflected the essence of a teaching (Leavy, 2009; Prendergast, 2009). These I arranged into a free verse teaching poem, which was also reviewed, edited, and approved by the participant. This teaching poem was then framed by my (limited) commentary and other first-person block quotations from the transcript.

Crafting the poems required an attentiveness akin to ceremony. I considered how each pause, comma, or line break might hold or release breath and how rhythm could echo the patterns of conversation and the heartbeat of the land that surrounded each story. The process of curating, punctuating, and pausing drew partly from the original inflections and rhythms of participants' speech; at other times, I gently inserted punctuation to guide the reader's movement and maintain the emotional cadence of the telling. I used italics and indentation to distinguish between direct and indirect quotations, creating a visual rhythm that mirrored how stories move between spoken, remembered, and embodied knowledge. Stanza breaks emerged intuitively—often at moments where the energy shifted, a breath was needed, or a new teaching revealed itself. Parallel structure helped maintain coherence, while repetition and spacing became additional tools for reflection, encouraging the reader to slow down, to listen.

This process, grounded in *nistohtamowin*, which is a deep understanding that engages mind, body, heart, and spirit (Absolon, 2011; Michell, 2013), was not about crafting perfect poems but about honouring the relational energy between storyteller and listener. Meaning arose holistically, through emotion and spirit as much as intellect. Each poem, together with commentary and participant transcripts, formed a knowledge bundle that was returned for review. Through this cycle of reflection, feedback, and reciprocity, Indigenist poetics became both a method and a living practice of resurgence; one that breathes story, spirit, and relationship into the process of making meaning. Marking my thoughts: Reflective journaling To gather the teachings, learnings, and reflections that arose from my time with each doula, I relied on journaling, a practice already familiar to me and congruent with Indigenous ways of reflective knowing. I recorded experiences during data collection, conversations with the advisory circle, dreams, ceremonies, and other moments of significance. All poems in this article emerged from these journal reflections, which I also wove throughout the dissertation to trace the evolution of my thinking and process.

One journal entry captures this iterative process of *mamâhtâwisiwin*—deep contemplation and spiritual reflection: I have been sitting for the last month with the question: when will I know I am done collecting stories and sitting in conversation? As the excitement for the project continues, I am also aware of the time constrictions and limitations on myself as a re-researcher using this methodology for a dissertation project. How can I sit in a space of deep contemplation as described by [Willie] Ermine? What can I do to create this space in my everyday life? (Personal journal reflection, February 26, 2020)

In the months that followed, I reflected on how I would recognize *môsihtâwin*, that intuitive gut feeling or aha! moment of realization signaling completeness of my re-researching. The answer came, fittingly enough, through a dream.

### **Picking up my bundle**

Last night in my dreams I went visiting.  
 I travelled to where people were gathered.  
 Sitting at round tables  
 Laughter filling the room

It was dim, there was a celebration  
 A coming together of knowledge keepers  
 Sitting and visiting  
 Visiting and sharing

In another home, one storyteller shared a journey  
 Where he let go of his past  
 Wild horses kicking up dust  
 Until they were only tiny specks on the horizon

I didn't know, but my family waited, and waited  
 I didn't know, but they were ready, bags packed.  
 I gathered the stories, all that I had learned  
 It was time to move on.

It was time to move forward.

Picking up my bundle, together, we walked.

–GR, April 14, 2020

This dream began with packing my bags to attend a gathering of deeply respected Indigenous knowledge keepers working in reproductive justice. My two suitcases were overflowing, and I struggled to close them. In a vividly comic moment, I jumped on them to zip them up. Once I arrived at the gathering, I was given the responsibility of serving the meal to the knowledge keepers. I visited every table, placing plates of delicious food. When that duty was finished, I was able to sit down and join them. The dream continued until I was at a gathering where my family was waiting for me. The realization or aha! moment in this dream was that I had gathered enough stories and that it was time to share what had been gifted in this work. Once I had attended to the responsibilities, I would be able to rejoin my family.

## 7. DISCUSSION

Fourteen Indigenous full-spectrum doulas shared their stories through this relational process. Thirteen participants reviewed and approved their condensed transcripts and story bundles, which included the teaching poems and learning poems co-created through our process. (One participant could not be reached for final approval and was therefore not included.) The full story bundles and transcripts are available in my dissertation (Rowe, 2020), and selected examples

of collaborative poems are published elsewhere (Rowe, Waban Toop, Two Bears & Kelly, 2023). Their participation affirmed the viability and resonance of Indigenist poetic inquiry as a co-creative method of meaning making.

**7.1. Honouring identity in Indigenist poetic inquiry.** Participants' identities were lived presences within the stories themselves. Their nations, lands, languages, lineages, and teachings were deeply interwoven into how they described their journeys into birth work and how they enacted care in their communities. These elements emerged organically in our relational conversations and were carried forward into the co-created teaching poems.

Each poem held the cadence, imagery, and teachings specific to that participant's worldview and community context. In this way, identity was embedded within story—reflected in references to land, ceremony, kinship systems, language, and responsibilities. Indigenist poetic inquiry does not seek to synthesize or collapse these distinct identities into shared themes; instead, it preserves the specificity of each nation's epistemological grounding.

While the identities of participants were not examined comparatively or in relation to one another, their stories formed a constellation, and I was the central relational connector among them. Through my own reflective and relational response poems, I documented how I was transformed by their teachings. These response poems became a site of relational weaving where the intersections of nations were held. In this way, the methodology honoured both distinctiveness and interconnectedness without erasing difference or imposing pan-Indigenous generalizations.

**7.2. Methodological innovation and contribution.** This paper demonstrates how Indigenist poetic inquiry can operate as a living methodology, one that is holistic, responsive, and relational, aligning closely with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Rather than fragmenting knowledge into analytical parts, this approach maintains stories as whole entities, emphasizing context, spirit, and relationship. The transmission of Indigenous knowledge through story is central to this process. Stories are not only data but also vessels of memory and responsibility; they carry teachings across generations and sustain Indigenous resurgence. By engaging with stories as living relatives that are connected to land, family, and collective history, Indigenist poetic inquiry helps reawaken these relationships and reminds us of our responsibilities to them.

Drawing from Indigenous and Cree poetics, this inquiry treats poetry as both method and outcome, as an embodied form of meaning-making that reveals relationship and reciprocity. Indigenous poetry, as a form of resurgence, allows for recognition, healing, and connection. It expresses who we are and who we are becoming. In this sense, Indigenist poetic inquiry is not simply a tool for representing experience but a process of relational engagement and transformation. Through ceremony, reflection, and creative practice, it invites those *môsihtâwin* moments of intuitive insight and deepens into *nistohtamowin*, or holistic understanding, through *mamâhtâwisiwin*, the contemplative state where spirit and

knowledge meet. These interwoven processes transform re-researcher and re-research alike, enacting resurgence through the art and practice of making meaning.

**7.3. Implications of Indigenist poetic inquiry for interdisciplinary and community research.** Indigenist poetic inquiry contributes to Indigenous research methodologies by making explicit how worldviews and values can guide knowledge creation and interpretation. It opens a space for sensemaking rooted in Indigenous practice, where analysis moves beyond data towards understanding shaped by story, spirit, and relationship. This approach aligns with the orality, rhythm, and humility inherent in Indigenous storytelling traditions and calls attention to how poetic methods can embody listening as much as expression. Indigenist poetic inquiry invites Indigenous and allied scholars and community members to reflect on their relationships with resurgence and with the stories that sustain it.

Its applications are interdisciplinary, resonating across fields such as communications, arts, health, education, and social sciences. In creative disciplines such as English, theatre, visual arts, film, and media, it offers a method for sharing stories that ask “Whose story is this? Who tells it, and for whom?” Through this process, poetry becomes both art and inquiry, a relational act that privileges Indigenous voices and transforms lived experience into co-created meaning. In community contexts, Indigenist poetic inquiry can foster collaboration between re-researchers and knowledge holders to elicit and present stories in ethical, reciprocal ways. Many Indigenous doulas described the process of sharing their stories as affirming and healing by helping them locate insight, peace, and renewed purpose. Seeing their experiences represented in teaching and learning poems brought validation and collective pride. These responses remind us that creating space for Indigenous stories in both community and academic settings is a necessary act of resurgence.

**7.4. Limitations of Indigenist poetic inquiry.** While the Indigenist paradigm was essential for this work, it also has inherent boundaries. This re-research did not seek generalizability, nor did it attempt to find common themes across nations. Such aims would risk pan-Indigenism, erasing the distinct worldviews, languages, and practices that shape Indigenous diversity. A core principle of Indigenist research is that no shared understanding can ever be assumed; each story is specific to its relations and place. For this project, what might appear as a lack of pattern is instead a deliberate refusal to collapse difference. The diversity of Indigenous full-spectrum doulas’ perspectives reflects both their autonomy and the localized nature of resurgence. The aim was to honour specificity, not to define commonality.

This re-research emerged from relationships between me as a Muskego Innineew re-researcher and the participants who chose to share their stories. Meaning arose inside the fluid, contextual space we created together. As Absolon (2011) writes, it is “finding meaning in all the berries I gathered” (p. 33). Context, relationship, and place all matter; who we are and how we come together shape what is known. Ultimately, these findings represent my own situated and transitory

understandings, shaped by my positionality and the relationships formed through this work. They are not representative of all Indigenous peoples or even of all Muskego Inninew re-researchers. What this re-search offers instead is a respectful holding of context—a reminder that Indigenist poetic inquiry values relationship over generalization, story over summary, and meaning that is always particular, embodied, and alive.

## 8. CONCLUSION: STEPPING FORWARD INTO THE STORIES

The process of making meaning in this work is deeply relational and inherently subjective. It arises from the spaces of connection created in each encounter, whether with participants, with stories, or with spirit. The lessons and teachings that emerged are contextual and evolving, not prescriptive or complete. As storytellers, poets, and listeners, we are always in motion; what a poem offers today may reveal something entirely different tomorrow.

Indigenist poetic inquiry invites readers and re-researchers to enter into their own relationships with these stories, inviting them to find resonance, insight, and transformation in them. Meaning unfolds through participation: through the willingness to listen, to feel, and to respond. Each reader's engagement will differ, as it should. This multiplicity reflects the heart of Indigenist re-search, where understanding is relational, embodied, and always in conversation.

I invite the reader to approach these poems and stories as living bundles, to open them with care, with gratitude, and with curiosity. Listen for what they have to offer. Attend to what they stir in one's heart, one's memory, one's responsibilities. Let them serve as a guide towards the *môsihtâwin*, moments of awareness, and *nistohtamowin*, deep understanding, that will all be different for every reader.

More broadly, I invite readers to consider how their own work might become *re search*; how it might nurture strong, reciprocal relationships with participants, lands, waters, and more-than-human kin and how it might weave ceremony, imagination, and vision into the creation of knowledge. When we engage in this way, we do more than interpret stories; we step forward into them, allowing them to transform us and, in doing so, to further the collective work of Indigenous resurgence.

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