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# Beyond the "Indigenizing the Academy" Trend: Learning from Indigenous Higher Education Land-Based and Intercultural Pedagogies to Build Trans-Systemic Education

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Article abstract

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# Beyond the "Indigenizing the Academy" Trend: Learning from Indigenous Higher Education Land-Based and Intercultural Pedagogies to Build Trans-Systemic Education

**Marie-Eve Drouin-Gagné**

Abstract Given the UNDRIP's assertion of Indigenous Peoples' rights to their education and knowledge systems, and in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action, many Canadian Universities are considering "Indigenizing the Academy." Yet, the meaning of such undertaking remains to be clarified. This article explores trans-systemic approaches as a possible avenue for "Indigenizing the Academy," and, more specifically, what Indigenous higher education programs and institutions can contribute to a trans-systemic approach to education. Considering two existing models I encountered in my doctoral research, namely the Intercultural approach as developed in the Andes (García et al., 2004; Mato, 2009; Sarango, 2009; Walsh, 2012), and land-based pedagogy as developed in North America (Coulthard, 2017; Coulthard & Simpson, 2016; Tuck et al., 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014), I argue they present trans-systemic elements that would allow us to re-think the frameworks in which to engage with Indigenous Peoples' rights and knowledge systems in the mainstream academy. What could be learned from the principles and practices of these two Indigenous higher education philosophies to articulate Indigenous knowledge into trans-systemic education in the mainstream academy in ways that foster solidarity and mutual understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people?

KeyWords Indigenous higher education, trans-systemic education, intercultural education, land-based pedagogy, decolonization

## Positioning Myself

I approach the theme of this issue of *Engaged Scholar Journal* on Indigenous and trans-systemic knowledge systems from a specific standpoint that seems important to unfold before I get to my argument. Born and raised in Montreal, the descendant of a Franco-Québécois family, my education left out a piece of my identity and my place in the world, which I ignored for most of my life: the fact that I am a settler on unceded Indigenous territory, and that I am a result and an actor of the colonial and globalizing processes of this world, right here in my "hometown." It took me several years living abroad in South America and meeting faculty members of an Indigenous University in Ecuador to begin questioning my position and history as a member of a settler society.

Given the ignorance which I constructed and consolidated throughout my years of education, I decided to center my doctoral research on Indigenous higher education. I quickly

realized that the personal ignorance I experienced in my education is part of a bigger problem, the academy's epistemic ignorance, which is a result of colonial processes and the ensuing socio-cultural hierarchies (Kuokkanen, 2007). Working with Indigenous higher education institutions and programs in the US and Ecuador, in the academic context of "Indigenizing the Academy" and in the national context of "reconciliation," I argued throughout my dissertation that mainstream universities could learn lessons from existing approaches in Indigenous higher education programs and institutions. At Concordia University, I became involved with the Indigenous Direction Leadership Group, which brought important changes in our institutions to decolonize and Indigenize it.

It is based on these experiences that I now contemplate trans-systemic knowledge systems as transformative avenues for the academy. I sincerely hope to contribute to better education for future generations in trans-systemic frameworks that will engage with Indigenous Peoples' complex knowledge systems and the full realization of Indigenous Peoples' rights. However, some obstacles remain in our national and institutional frameworks to attain such a goal. This article addresses some of these obstacles and considers how trans-systemic education inspired by Indigenous higher education could bring some solutions to overcome them. As a settler and a scholar, I do not pretend to bring Indigenous knowledges in the academy. I instead situate myself in a critique of mainstream academy based on what I have learned from Indigenous higher education.

**What Framework for Indigenous Rights and Knowledges in the Academy?**

In 2015 after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) issued its reports, it remains to be seen how its 94 calls to action will be fully implemented throughout Canada. In its calls to action, the TRC refers to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), calling upon all levels of government to implement said declaration "as the framework for reconciliation" (TRC, 2015, Call to action #43). It also calls upon "the Government of Canada to develop a national action plan, strategies, and other concrete measures to achieve the goals of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*" (TRC, 2015, Call to action #44). In December 2020, the Government of Canada put forward Bill C-15, which "provides that the Government of Canada must take all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and must prepare and implement an action plan to achieve the objectives of the Declaration" (House of Commons of Canada, 2020).[1] While this allows for UNDRIP to become a new legal instrument in Canadian courts, many questions remain as to how the implementation of this international declaration into domestic laws will play out, as

1 In 2016, Roméo Saganash, a Cree Member of Parliament, introduced Bill C-262, a private members bill aiming at ensuring that the laws of Canada are in harmony with the UNDRIP. This was Saganash's second attempt since 2013 to have Canadas's laws aligned with this international declaration. However, the bill was stalled in the senate until the dissolution of the parliament in 2019. The liberals then promised during their campaign to submit a bill to adopt the UNDRIP nationally, which they fulfilled in December 2020. It is also to be noted that the Government of British Columbia had already passed Bill 41 that puts UNDRIP into action by provincial legislation.

it still has to be interpreted in the framework of the Canadian constitution, including section 35(1) and 35(2) regarding Aboriginal rights.[2] It is to be noted that, while the UNDRIP affirms Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, the multiple rights that it recognized are still presented in a nation-state framework, where the state is responsible for the implementation of such rights.[3] In this context, while the realization of Indigenous Peoples' rights seems to rely on nation-states transforming their relationships with Indigenous Peoples, one can wonder how settler states such as Canada can become agents of decolonization, without questioning their own structures, laws, jurisdictions, and, more importantly, the histories, traditions, and overall modes of thinking that support them. In other words, if Indigenous Peoples' rights to education and to their own systems of knowledge are to be implemented in a nation-state framework, then the coloniality of this framework needs to be questioned, in relation to Indigenous Nations' own framework.

In terms of education, as the TRC Calls to action are meant to redress the legacy of residential schools, they also include many recommendations regarding education, both in terms of addressing the educational inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people through adequate support for Indigenous education (Calls to action #6-12), and in terms of establishing a system of "education for reconciliation" that would aim at teaching about colonial realities and including Indigenous knowledges in education at all levels (Calls to action #62-65). Both the implementation of the UNDRIP, which contains rights to education and traditional knowledges, and the call for an "education for reconciliation" require changes in our educational systems. However, the question remains as to what framework(s) will allow these changes to occur.

Implementing the UNDRIP nationally implies changes in our educational systems in terms of the right of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination in establishing and controlling their educational systems and institutions (UNDRIP, 2007, art. 14), but also in terms of the right for Indigenous Peoples to have their diverse "cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations […] appropriately reflected in education and public information" (UNDRIP, 2007, art. 15). Additionally, article 31 of the UNDRIP states the right of Indigenous Peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their knowledge systems, including their sciences, which arguably could be done through education. This, nevertheless, would challenge the continuous colonial knowledge hierarchies that installed a "Western privilege" (Kuokkanen, 2007) or "white privilege" or a "settler privilege" (Irlbacher-Fox, 2014) in educational institutions of the Americas.

2 See, for example, Russ Diabo's critique of Bill C-15 on December 21, 2020: https://www.aptnnews.ca/national-news/undrip-bill-c-15-federal-government-soverignty-russ-diabo/

3 For example, Article 38 of the UNDRIP mentions that "States in consultation and cooperation with Indigenous peoples, shall take the appropriate measures, including legislative measures, to achieve the ends of this Declaration". In fact, many articles of the UNDRIP are structured around (1) the affirmation of Indigenous rights, followed by (2) the call for States to implement them ("States shall in [consultation, cooperation, conjunction, etc.] with Indigenous Peoples take measures to…"). Additionally, article 46 of the declaration reaffirm the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of nation-states, in which framework the rights of Indigenous Peoples are to be realized.

Indeed, Battiste (2013) argues that while it might no longer be acceptable for educational institutions to discriminate against Indigenous Peoples based on their skin colour or "race," their intellectual traditions continue to be rejected, based on colonial cultural hierarchies. Battiste articulates how this rejection becomes institutionalized in the academy, mainly through curricular selection and exclusion:

> Selecting curricular knowledge requires that decisions made include the overriding issues of power, status, and legitimation, as well as racism, hierarchy, and normativity. These decisions entail questions about whose knowledge is included, whose languages are considered legitimate vehicles for carrying the knowledge, who are the people who make these decisions, how will their choice be made, and what governs those choices? (Battiste, 2013, p. 105)

Accordingly, colonial legacies in the academy entail institutionalizing hierarchies of knowledge and what Battiste has called "cognitive imperialism" (Battiste, 2005).[4] Engaging with Indigenous knowledge and education as fundamental rights to be implemented and protected in educational institutions implies addressing these knowledge hierarchies.

Following the TRC report, many Canadian universities jumped on the "Indigenizing the academy" wagon (Compton, 2016; "Indigenizing the academy: the way forward," 2016; MacDonald, 2016) or at least formed committees and task forces to address "reconciliation" in their institutions (see, for example, Concordia University, 2019; McGill University, 2017; Queen's University, 2016; Stewart, 2016). Institutionally, the renewed interest in "Indigenizing the Academy," which has become almost synonymous with efforts to enact reconciliation in the academy, raises the question of the framework in which "Indigenizing" happens. "Decolonizing" and "Indigenizing" the academy are becoming common expressions, almost trendy, in the past couple of years, but their meaning remains hard to pin down.

For example, Newhouse (2016) mentions that the cultural representation of Indigenous Peoples in the academy is not enough, and the real Indigenization of universities needs to address the labour happening in the academy, which is "about knowledge and its production and transmission from one generation to another" (p. A2). The goal should thus be for Indigenous knowledges to affect and transform research and teaching that happens across all disciplines in universities. Similarly, Kuokkanen (2007) suggests that the academy needs to shift its mindset towards a "logic of the gift" and hospitality regarding Indigenous epistemes. In other words, Indigenizing the academy means "reclaiming and validating indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and research questions" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 143). This task, as many Indigenous scholars have argued over the years (Alfred, 1999, 2008; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Kuokkanen, 2007; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004 ), cannot remain the burden of Indigenous Peoples. The mainstream academy must address the limits of its Eurocentric

4 Cognitive imperialism is a form of manipulation used in Eurocentric educational systems. Built on damaging assumptions and imperialist knowledge, educational curricula and pedagogy are built on a monocultural foundation of knowledge, and privileges it through public education (Battiste, 1986).

teaching and research activities and find frameworks to engage with Indigenous knowledge and legal systems respectfully.

However, if educational institutions have been and continue to be one of the main tools for colonization and assimilation (Battiste, 2013; Child & Klopotek, 2014; Grande, 2004; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006), how can they become tools of Indigenization? If there is a tradition of Eurocentric intellectual privileges, of "white supremacy of intellectual conventions" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 65) and cognitive racism (Battiste, 2013) engrained in our institutions, a profound questioning of mainstream academic frameworks will be needed for any meaningful Indigenization to happen.

In the current state of the academy, Indigenous knowledges, when considered, tend to be included as content within a Western scientific framework (Bala & Gheverghese Joseph, 2007), mostly as objects of study. The extraction of information and intellectual labours is still taking place in research projects that systematically study Indigenous Peoples and analyze them based on the researcher's worldviews, theories and understandings (Smith, 1999, 2012). Bala and Gheverghese (2007) warn against this type of "one-sided attempt to exploit traditional knowledge to advance science, by using traditional techniques and data to further articulate modern scientific theoretical and methodological programs" (p. 54). They mention that Indigenous knowledges are not only a set of practices and body of information, but also imply theoretical frameworks and methods that ought to be considered if Western sciences are to establish real, equitable, dialogues with other sciences.

To sum up, real tensions exist between the aspirations of the UNDRIP and the TRC — including the "Indigenizing the academy" trend that ensued it — and the frameworks in which these aspirations are to be realized. This article aims to consider trans-systemic approaches to resolve these tensions. Furthermore, I suggest that Indigenous higher education (IHE) already points to trans-systemic models, from which mainstream universities could learn to engage with Indigenous Peoples' knowledge systems and educational rights. My aim is not to appropriate IHE practices and information but to consider two IHE models' theoretical frameworks as transformative perspectives for the mainstream academy.

**Trans-systemic Approaches as Possible Educational Frameworks**

In 1999, McGill's Faculty of Law implemented its "Transsystemic legal education" program (McGill University, 2020), which aimed at combining the teaching of common law and civic law for a broader understanding of these systems that co-exist in Québec, and an even more expansive understanding of legal orders in a global perspective. As articulated by Rosalie Jukier (2005) one of the Faculty members, "transsystemia focuses on the fundamental structures, ideas, values, techniques, and processes of law, rather than the laws or legal rules of a single jurisdiction" (p. 792). In other words, a trans-systemic approach unveils the frameworks in which diverse legal orders emerge, rather than focussing on the content of specific laws.

In doing so, Jukier (2005) argues, the program engages its students in a dialogue with "systems that have distinct historical developments and distinct modes of organization and that evidence other ways of structuring and thinking" (p. 792). Addressing the "fallacious

notion that there is one structure of reality" (Jukier, 2005, p. 795), a trans-systemic approach therefore opens the door for deeper dialogues between different modes of thinking, or different knowledge systems, rather than enclosing the content of other knowledge systems into one's own. This is also a powerful way of unsettling existing hierarchies, as it leads to questioning one's own system:

> Understanding the differences in another mode of thinking (in this case, another legal tradition) causes one to question the approach in one's own mode of thinking (or legal tradition), which ultimately invites opportunity for greater insight and more sophisticated contemplation of both. (Jukier, 2018, p. 11)

Hence, a trans-systemic approach in education could create an adequate framework to engage with Indigenous knowledge systems and educational rights.

The University of Victoria took an affirmative step in that direction with the implementation, in September 2018, of a joint degree program in Canadian Common Law and Indigenous Legal Orders. In this program, the trans-systemic approach in law now includes Indigenous legal orders in Canada. As Alan Hanna, a member of the Faculty writes:

> Reconciliation with First Nations requires a sea change in the Canadian legal system and in peoples' minds to think and act in new ways that involve respect, reciprocity, humility, and equality. Engaging with Indigenous legal traditions after Indigenous people have been engaging with state law since the beginning of the colonial encounter is an act of reciprocity, which signals a sincere interest in recognizing difference and reconciling relationships. (Hanna, 2019, p. 839)

Arguably, a trans-systemic approach in legal education allows for this type of reconciliation and unsettling of hierarchies to be implemented. Hence, Hadley Friedland at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Law contends that the trans-systemic approach, as developed at McGill, "offers one way of thinking through how Indigenous laws can be taught and learned within law schools" (Friedland, 2018, p. 270).

Moreover, Friedland reminds us that Indigenous Peoples throughout Canada are much more used to trans-systemic systems than the rest of Canadians, as they have had to navigate more than one system at the time (Friedland, 2018, p. 279). She points at the lack of necessity, until now, for settler population to engage in these trans-systemic processes, as Indigenous Peoples' laws (and knowledge systems) have been erased or invisibilized in our education. However, this means that Canadians and mainstream universities can learn from Indigenous Peoples' ways of navigating multiple systems, or, in other words, from their trans-systemic approaches.

I am interested in taking this argument for trans-systemic teaching in law schools, based on Indigenous Peoples' trans-systemic experiences and expertise, and apply it to higher education and Indigenous knowledge systems in general. Based on my Ph.D. research on Indigenous higher education as a tool for decolonization (Drouin-Gagné, 2019), I am convinced that

if we are to engage with Indigenous rights to their knowledge systems and education, and if we intend to "Indigenize the Academy," then we need to pay attention to the work done in the past 50+ years by Indigenous educators, scholars, and institutions of higher education. Just as Indigenous Peoples and scholars in Indigenous laws have a better understanding of trans-systemic approaches to law, so do Indigenous educators and scholars regarding trans-systemic approach to knowledge and education. And while many models have been developed in IHE in the past decades, I would argue they all imply trans-systemic elements that would allow us re-thinking the frameworks in which to engage with Indigenous Peoples' rights and knowledge systems in the mainstream academy. The next section presents two existing models I encountered in my research — the Intercultural approach as developed in the Andes and land-based pedagogy as developed in North America — and how they both contribute to a decolonial trans-systemic approach to education.

**Indigenous Models of Trans-systemic Education**

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the efforts of Indigenous Peoples to establish control over their own education systems have been part of ongoing struggles to ascertain social and political sovereignty (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Battiste, 2000; Brayboy, 2005). It is for this reason that Indigenous higher education (IHE) has developed in the last 60 years or so (Barnhardt, 1991; Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Wilson, 2008) across the Americas as an essential tool for national and international processes of decolonization (Beck, 1999; García et al., 2004; Juneau, 2001; Stonechild, 2006; Szasz, 1974, 1977, 1999). Depending on the local, regional and national contexts, IHE encompasses many models (e.g., storytelling, community-based pedagogy, place/land-based pedagogy, intercultural pedagogy), which cannot all be explored in this paper. To give an idea of how IHE can contribute to the development of trans-systemic educational approaches, I consider here two models developed in two different contexts: the Andean intercultural approach as developed by the Indigenous, intercultural and communal university Amawtay Wasi in Ecuador, and the North American land-based pedagogy approach, which was developed in many institutions and programs, but I am considering more closely the Dechinta Center for Research and Learning (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016).

***Interculturality (Andes)***

In the Andes, since the 1930s (Bolivia) and 1940s (Ecuador), Indigenous movements continuously worked toward developing a bilingual education that would be intercultural,[5] with the explicit aim of maintaining Indigenous languages and cultures alive. In 1982, the Ecuadorian government officially established intercultural, bilingual education, at least in

5 *Intercultural* and *Interculturalidad* (in Spanish) has often been translated in English with cross-cultural (see, for example, De La Cadena, 2006), rather than intercultural. However, *interculturalidad* as described and put forward by the Amawtay Wasi includes a deep respect, understanding and conversation between different cultures — intercultural — rather than a comparison, acknowledgement of cultures and their differences — cross-cultural.

regions where Indigenous Peoples were the majority.[6] In 1988, two years after the creation of the national Indigenous organization — the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) — the government agreed in establishing the National Intercultural Bilingual Education Department – (García et al., 2004). The efforts for a control over intercultural and bilingual education were paired with activism for the redefinition of the nation-state into a plurinational state, that would recognize the specificity of Indigenous nations and the sovereignty of Indigenous communities. In Ecuador and Bolivia's case, Indigenous mobilization eventually led to Constitutional Assemblies, which redefined the countries as plurinational states in the 2000s. In both countries, these processes also involved the development of Indigenous higher education since the 1990s.

The Indigenous, Intercultural and Communal University Amawtay Wasi was established in Ecuador in 2004.[7] The Amawtay Wasi's project, as articulated in its foundational document (García et al., 2004), can be summarized in the following way: having a higher education that would (1) be rooted in an intercultural and plurinational philosophy; that would (2) build positive relationships with Indigenous communities; and (3) would work with their Indigenous knowledges while engaging in scientific dialogues. Accordingly, the Amawtay Wasi's philosophy includes an epistemological and political decolonial project relying on two main aspects: the intercultural paradigm on which it relies for knowledge building and transmission; and the political goal of Indigneous communities' Good Life in an intercultural perspective (García et al., 2004, p. 284). "Good life" refers to the support of the multiple life projects of the different nations composing the Ecuadorian State, including Indigenous Nations.

*Interculturality as a Dialogical Approach*

In the Amawtay Wasi's philosophy, the intercultural paradigm includes the recognition of worldviews, myths, and axioms as the context in which knowledges are developed in diverse communities. In this intercultural view, any way of producing, organizing and transmitting knowledge will imply a specific relationship to traditions, ancestral philosophies, symbols and myths that organize the scientific logic (García et al., 2004).[8] This context does not invalidate knowledge as pseudo-scientific, but rather, it is a first step in understanding the differences between knowledge systems to establish a conversation between them. Thus, as part of the decolonial project of the Amawtay Wasi is an epistemological undertaking that reasserts the validity of Indigenous knowledges as theoretical frameworks, and which fosters conversations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges, intending to decolonize science and the knowledge hierarchy it implies.

6 From the state perspective, intercultural policies served, and continue serving, integration of Indigenous Peoples. In other words, "special" programs of Intercultural and bilingual education are created for Indigenous Peoples based on the assumption that Indigenous students should become bilingual and intercultural, whereas non-Indigenous students could maintain their monolingual/monocultural education (Walsh, 2012, p. 157).

7 For further information on the complex, on-going history of the Amawtay Wasi, see Vargas Moreno (2014) and Drouin-Gagné (2016, 2019).

8 This is a common perspective in Indigenous relational epistemologies (Meyer, 2001; S. Wilson, 2008).

Accordingly, part of Amawtay Wasi's epistemological project implies that knowledge building should integrate various cultural perspectives to achieve a broader understanding of the complexity of the world. This is achieved in class by presenting informative modules about Western perspectives on a certain subject and informative modules about Indigenous perspectives on the same subject. Students also learn through practical projects in which they are asked to integrate both perspectives. Indigenous communities' members participate in the process as knowledge keepers with whom students interact. Therefore, oral and experiential Indigenous knowledges are part of the curriculum as valid sources of knowledge. To achieve such a pedagogical model, the University is established in the communities, with teaching centers in La Esperanza, Saraguro, and Macas, and in Quito, where the administrative center of the university is also situated.

*Interculturality and Indigenous Rights*

Indigenous communities' life projects are at the center of the Amawtay Wasi's educational model, through the disciplines taught: intercultural pedagogy to educate Indigenous youth, agro-ecology sustaining food sovereignty and respecting the ecology in the communities, ancestral architecture reflecting the ecological and cultural context of Indigenous communities, and communication fostering Indigenous communities' self-determination. Thus, the Amawtay Wasi's model includes the importance of serving communities through the university. This community engagement serves the political decolonial project of a plurinational state, shifting the focus from a nation-state framework in terms of Indigenous rights, to a framework where communities are at the center, defining their needs and projects.

In terms of educational rights, the Amawtay Wasi was established by the Ecuador's national Indigenous organization (CONAIE) to respond to the need for Indigenous post-secondary education representing the 14 Indigenous nations' knowledge systems in an intercultural perspective (Sarango, 2009). De la Cadena (2006) presents the work of the Amawtay Wasi as the materialization of the effort to restructure the old state, questioning the liberal consensus that sustains it, as well as its colonial hierarchies. More specifically, De la Cadena argues that the Amawtay Wasi represents the most ambitious version of interculturality since it both questions the knowledge structure and institutions of the liberal consensus and contributes to the rewriting of national history (De La Cadena, 2006). Accordingly, the Amawtay Wasi played an important role in the official articulation of Indigenous practices and philosophies that support Indigenous movements' struggles in Ecuador for a reform of the state (plurinational state) and the economy (around the principle of *Sumak Kawsay* – or the Good Life). Consequently, Amawtay Wasi is developing a higher education that challenges Ecuadorian society, politics, and economy, based on inter-epistemic conversation and a critical interculturality (Walsh, 2011) which aim at transforming the society and the state based on Indigenous knowledges, concepts, and practices.

*Interculturality and Indigenous Knowledges*

The intercultural model developed by the Amawtay Wasi reframes Indigenous knowledges and their place in the academy by challenging the hierarchy between university and community knowledges. Amawtay Wasi's philosophy emphasizes a construction of knowledge in a reciprocal relation with communities: communities are the subject and not object of knowledge — they contribute to its production — and the knowledge and activities of the university are meant to serve the communities. Concretely, the Amawtay Wasi articulates a knowledge creation process through four areas: informative modules, preparation to investigation, undertaking (practice) and conversations. While all the areas relate to the communities in different ways, the conversation part explicitly implies that students would enter in conversation with people in the communities, who are considered experts in their field, to learn from them and have a conversation about whatever subject or field they are studying. Thus, students undertake concrete projects informed both by the informative modules taught in class and by the knowledge of the community members they meet in the practical and conversational modules.

Hence, teaching, which implies researching, involves service of the community to the university. In return, as knowledges come from the community, and as students then put these in dialogue with Western knowledges in their own practical projects, at the end of the process, it is also important to return the outcomes to the communities. This is usually done with a "harvesting feast" through which the students present their projects to each other, to their professors, but also to community members who are invited. This is a time to give back and also to receive feedback from community members. Students' projects aim at producing knowledge that would serve the community, rather than the sole purpose of knowledge in and of itself or the academic purposes.

*Interculturality as a Decolonizing Trans-systemic Approach*

The Amawtay Wasi's unique epistemological project of a "scientific dialogue" between Indigenous and Western knowledges aims at decolonizing science and its knowledge hierarchy, through a curriculum and a methodology inspired by Andean worldview and symbolism, which support recuperation and revalorization of Indigenous and community-based knowledges (García et al., 2004). In its intercultural approach, the Amawtay Wasi presents Indigenous and Western knowledges as built on the worldviews, symbols, myths, axioms, and histories of their respective communities, rather than one being scientific and the other being traditional. This "critical interculturality" (Walsh, 2012) is therefore linked to a decolonial praxis that questions power and racialization implied in the construction of the cultural difference (Walsh, 2012, p. 171). In this perspective, Western and Indigenous knowledges are complementary alternatives that can relate in productive dialogues. The Amawtay Wasi's critical interculturality (Walsh, 2012) therefore offers a trans-systemic framework of knowledge building and transmission, in which a multicultural recognition of scientific knowledge systems and cross-cultural exchanges between them can be both creative and helpful in the advancement of our understanding of the world and its complexity (García et al., 2004; Walsh, 2012).

This trans-systemic framework takes a distance from institutional and nation-state frameworks by putting the community at the center of their knowledge practices in different ways: first, by answering needs expressed or identified in the communities, and in some cases, in the Indigenous movement or organizations; and second, by considering the community as an integral part of the knowledge-building process. The community is not only an object of knowledge — or an object of study — but it is also the subject expressing knowledge and teaching it to the students, as well as participating in the assessment of the students' projects. Finally, the community is envisioned as being at the receptive end of the knowledge practice: the knowledge produced is shared through harvesting feast to give back the time and efforts invested by community members, Elders, and leaders. This directly challenges the power dynamics that exist between communities and the national academy. While Indigenous communities are at the center of the Amawtay Wasi, the intercultural approach developed here aims at changing and eventually decolonizing both academic knowledge and the Ecuadorian society generally. It forces a reframing of what we consider as valid knowledge in the academy and a reframing of Ecuadorian political and economic projects concerning Indigenous communities' knowledges and experiences.

***Land-Based Pedagogy (North America)***

In North America, many Indigenous authors recognize land as the source of knowledge for Indigenous nations, both traditionally and contemporary (Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016; Simpson, 2011,2017; Wildcat et al., 2014). Accordingly, and in response to a colonial educational system that has ignored, and even tried to destroy, Indigenous histories and knowledges, land-based pedagogy has emerged in Indigenous higher education systems, since at least the 2000s. Aiming at re-establishing the relationships between Indigenous Peoples and their territories, this pedagogy is part of the movement of Indigenous knowledges resurgence (Borrows, 2016a; Coulthard, 2017; Coulthard & Simpson, 2016; Simpson, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014).

Examples of this pedagogy include the University of Saskatchewan, where a master's program in education with a land-based focus has been offered since 2011. Inspired by Peggy and Stan Wilson and developed by their daughter Alex Wilson, the program alternates between online courses and 2-week intensive courses in Indigenous territories. The University of Victoria and the University of British Columbia have also developed Indigenous law courses based in territory (Borrows, 2016a). Following these experiences, the University of Victoria launched, in 2018, an Indigenous law program directed by Anishinaabe law professor John Borrows. Dr. Borrows has also been participating in Anishinaabe Law Camp, taking place every year in Anishinaabe territory. Law students and professors learn about Anishinaabe juridical principles with community knowledge holders and Indigenous law professors. Another emblematic initiative of land-based pedagogy is the Dechinta Center for Research and Learning, about which both Leanne Simpson and Glenn Coulthard have written extensively.

Dechinta is situated in the Northwest Territories. It offers training credited by the University of Alberta in collaboration with the University of British Columbia and the Dene First Nation

of Yellowknife and Indigenous experts of that territory. The curriculum includes issues of colonization, decolonization, Indigenous laws and languages, and sustainable community building. As a unique model, Dechinta is not necessarily exportable everywhere, but the principles that it embodies are. As a resurgence project, it offers an interesting possibility when it comes to thinking about trans-systemic approaches through land as an alternative framework to those of nation-state and academic institutions.

*Land-based Pedagogy as Resurgence*

While the Amawtay Wasi's interculturality emphasizes a dialogical approach, the land-based program at Dechinta instead focuses on Indigenous resurgence. Indigenous resurgence is fundamentally about the renewal and restoration of the relationships (material, ontological, and epistemological) of Indigenous Peoples with their lands, as well as the knowledges and responsibilities that are embedded in these relationships (Corntassel, 2012; Simpson, 2008). Coulthard and Simpson (2016) express the central role of land relationship in resurgence, saying that:

> Indigenous resistance and resurgence in response to the dispossession forces of settler colonization, in both historical and current manifestations, employ measures and tactics designed to protect Indigenous territories and to reconnect Indigenous bodies to land through the practices and forms of knowledge that these practices continuously regenerate. (p. 154)

Accordingly, land-based pedagogy is fundamental to resurgence (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Corntassel, 2012; Coulthard & Simpson, 2016; Simpson, 2008, 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014).

Furthermore, resurgence reframes Indigenous knowledges and life projects away from nation-state and institutional frameworks. According to Corntassel (2012), Alfred & Corntassel (2005) and Coulthard (2014), decentering Indigenous actions from the nation-state conceptions is an important dimension of resurgence. For example, this includes moving away from the rights-based discourse (legality), which creates an illusion of inclusion, to instead focus on Indigenous responsibilities to their relations, including with land (Corntassel, 2012). Hence, by centring on relations to land, resurgence offers a new way to engage with Indigenous rights and knowledges. Academically, this means to move "from talk[ing] about the land within conventional classroom settings, to studying instances where we engage in conversations with the land and on the land in a physical, social and spiritual sense" (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. II).

*Land-based Pedagogy and Indigenous Rights*

At the core of land-based pedagogy as resurgence lies a reframing of Indigenous rights in terms of the relationships to land. Many Indigenous scholars highlight how Indigenous juridical, political and ethical systems emerge from the relationship each nation establishes with their territory and its various entities (Borrows, 2016b; Corntassel, 2012; Metallic, 2008). However,

this relationship is disrupted by colonial violence and the imposition of a property/ownership relationship to land (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Hence, land-based pedagogy represents an answer to colonial violence:

> At the heart of colonialism is the violent separation of our peoples from our social relation to the land. Any education aimed at decolonization must confront that violence — and one of the best ways to do this is to reintroduce and re-place Indigenous peoples on their lands with the knowledge-holders who are experts in living it. That is the thinking behind Dechinta Bush University. (Coulthard, 2017, p. 58)

In this context, the decolonial project of reconnecting with land in a material, ontological, and epistemological level relates to the reassertion of Indigenous legal orders in relation to this land.

Finally, the conversation is reframed from talking about Indigenous Peoples' rights to the land, to asserting this right through the knowledge systems that the relationship to land entails. Land-based pedagogy therefore challenges and transforms the role of land, and the place for building relationships with land, in higher education, both intellectually and materially (Simpson, 2014). Hence, Simpson (2014) argues that decolonizing the academy means joining Indigenous Peoples in "dismantling settler colonialism and actively protecting the source of our knowledge — Indigenous *land*" (p. 22).

*Land-based Pedagogy and Indigenous Knowledges*

In a land-based pedagogy perspective, land is the context of Indigenous knowledges and traditions. It becomes the curriculum, the text and the professor (Wilson 2012). Land, or the territory, is a privileged place to practice language, remember histories, learn and practice ecological knowledges and reconnect with Indigenous philosophies. By reframing education around land, land-based pedagogy re-centres on Indigenous "source of knowledge and strength" (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. II). A relationship to the land is fundamental, according to these authors, to the "transmission of knowledge about the forms of governance, ethics and philosophies" (Wildcat, et al., 2014, p. II).

In other words, education through a relationship with land implies reconnecting with deep philosophical knowledge, including ontologies and epistemologies, but also political, ethical and juridical principles that emerge from the land and the different entities that are embedded in the relational networks of *places* (Coulthard, 2010). Coulthard and Simpson have described these principles in terms of "grounded normativity," which they define as "the ethical frameworks provided by these Indigenous place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016, p. 254).

Because land-based pedagogy allows one to connect to a specific territory, a place made of a web of relationships (Deloria, 2001), it also creates space for the relational nature of Indigenous knowledges. Building on Deloria's concept of place as a web of relations, Coulthard (2010) writes about the profoundly different orientation of place-based Indigenous

worldviews and time-oriented Western worldview. While the latter ought to be understood as the historical, developmental, evolutionary perspective on the world (which also comes with linear hierarchical power relationships), the former ought to be understood as a field of relationships that influence "a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating with the world; and these ways of knowing often guide forms of resistance to power relations that threaten to erase or destroy our senses of place" (Coulthard, 2010, p. 79). Finally, through the engagement with this place-based relational knowledge, land-based pedagogy contributes to the resurgence of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and it reconnects with Indigenous political and ethical principles from which solidarity with other nations (Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and other-than-human) can emerge. Land becomes the framework of this relationship.

*Land-based Pedagogy as a Decolonizing Trans-systemic Approach*

Indigenous land-based pedagogy offers a framework that shifts from nation-state conceptions of rights and institutional time-oriented conception of knowledge. Rather, it centres on Indigenous rights in terms of their emergence from a relationship to land and relational place-based orientation of Indigenous knowledges. It also offers a trans-systemic model in terms of possible place-based solidarity and learnings for non-Indigenous peoples. Land-based pedagogy's decolonial potential includes questioning settlers' place on the land and their relations to the land. Learning from a place and in relation to that place (and all the relations, genealogy, and power dynamics that a place entails) is a powerful tool to create concrete solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, in relation and care for a shared place.

For instance, Snelgrove et al. (2014) develop the concept of place-based solidarities where Indigenous resurgence meets settler colonial power in a relational and practical way that forces an engagement, on both sides, with "the literal and stolen ground on which people stand and come together upon" (Snelgrove et al., 2014). By working on the land, and through the relationships with the land, these authors contend that "solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples must be grounded in actual practices and place-based relationships, and be approached as incommensurable but not incompatible" (Snelgrove et al., 2014, p. 3). The engagement with the land on which we now have come to live, and the revealing of different, contradictory ways of relating to it between settler and Indigenous peoples, could be at the core of trans-systemic decolonizing process and development of new solidarities.

For example, Irlbacher-Fox recounts her experience, as a non-Indigenous person, in an Indigenous land-based education experience, where she realized that this could be a powerful tool to decolonize settlers because it disrupts the power dynamics and creates self-awareness for settlers:

> Settlers placed in Indigenous land-based education contexts are forced to understand themselves in relation to the limits of their knowledge contrasted with superior capabilities possessed by Indigenous Elders and land-based knowledge holders […] Transitioning from a position of dominance to one of dependence constitutes an important moment of "unsettling": reaching a place of potentially transformative

> discomfort. An often completely new and deeper understanding of Indigenous peoples' cultural practices then begins to fill what was once a space of ignorance and privilege, replacing erroneous beliefs with appreciation and understanding. (Irlbacher-Fox, 2014, p. 155)

Land-based pedagogy consequently offers the possibility not only for Indigenous Peoples to reconnect with their knowledges and cultures but for non-Indigenous people to question their privilege and live an "unsettling" experience, which might then create space for solidarity, alliances, and decolonization. Accordingly, Indigenous land-based pedagogy challenges the settler supremacy logic that underlines nation-states and educational institutions. The trans-systemic model of land-based pedagogy thus relies on a fundamental element of Indigenous identity (land), which is often ignored by settler institutions, in spite of its fundamental nature for settler identity too. By bringing together different (Indigenous and settlers) understandings, relations, and knowledges regarding the broader context of land and place, new comprehensions and solidarity can emerge.

**Re-Centering Land and Communities as Trans-Systemic Frameworks**

The two examples explored in this article — namely, intercultural and land-based education — point at two frameworks used to establish a trans-systemic education in their respective ways: communities and land. Both models are already trans-systemic in their ways of engaging Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, students, ideas, exchanges and solidarities. Could it be possible, then, for mainstream higher education to undertake a change of framework from a nation-state and institutionally centered perspective to one that centers on communities and land as sources of knowledges and trans-systemic understanding of these knowledges? How would that look like, concretely?

Aside from the many Indigenous scholars in mainstream universities across Canada who are making space for land-based research and teaching, universities across Canada have mainly engaged with the land through the emerging practice of territorial acknowledgements. A territorial acknowledgement is meant for a settler institution or person to recognize the Indigenous Peoples of the land they stand on and give visibility to the sustained Indigenous presence on the territory, both in terms of complex histories and current realities. In that sense, it can be a step towards addressing the colonial situation, repudiating the terra nullius ideology, and re-establishing nation-to-nation relationships. That is, of course, if the territorial acknowledgement is accompanied by commitments and actions for ongoing relationship building with land, Indigenous Peoples of the territory, and the institution or person making the acknowledgement. Without concrete changes in practices and relationships, a territorial acknowledgement runs the risk of staying on the symbolic level, thus playing the game of neo-liberal politics serving the colonial status quo (Coulthard, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Nevertheless, if it is supported by concrete relationship and practical changes, a territorial acknowledgement can be an important step for an academic institution to take towards engaging with Indigenous knowledges and rights through land. For example, this could take

the form of research on the history and genealogy of the land and cities where universities are situated, in collaboration with Indigenous communities in these lands, in order to uncover the colonial histories, but also make space for Indigenous knowledges of these places, and formulate alternative relationships to these lands, in a nation-to-nation approach with local Indigenous communities. Leanne Simpson reminds us that cities are also in Indigenous lands, and mainstream universities in urban context can also engage in place-based solidarity that and land-based pedagogy offers. According to her:

> The beauty of culturally inherent resurgence is that it challenges settler colonial dissections of our territories and our bodies into reserve/city or rural/urban dichotomies. All Canadian cities are on Indigenous lands. […] While it is critical that we grow and nurture a generation of people that can think within the land […] this doesn't have to take away from the contributions of urban Indigenous communities to our collective resurgence. (Simpson, 2014, p. 23)

In this context, land-based pedagogy has a tremendous decolonizing power in an urban context for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Henry, 2014).

When framed around land as the source of this relationship, the nation-to-nation relationship offers an interesting trans-systemic approach to engaging with Indigenous knowledges and rights in the academy. For example, in Montreal, where I work, it could take the form of re-storying (Dahl Aldern & Goode, 2014) the city as an Indigenous place, or as creating a curriculum that fosters Indigenous resurgence (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Simpson, 2014) and resituates non-Indigenous students as settlers in Montreal. These approaches allow for the possibility of creating a relationship with the land and land-based practices that will include respect for and solidarity with Indigenous communities in Montreal.

Indigenizing the academy also requires engaging with Indigenous communities, especially the communities in which territories universities are situated. For many years now, universities have been involved in building relationships with communities, sometimes including Indigenous communities, through offices of community outreach, development of community-based education programs and of community-based research approaches. Nevertheless, Barinaga and Parker (2013) highlight the problems that can emerge from such an endeavour if the power dynamics between communities and academia are not questioned, therefore "re-inscribing the sometimes harmful role universities have played in their engagement with communities, particularly communities of colour" (Barinaga & Parker, 2013, p. 6).

Consequently, Barinaga and Parker (2013) call for the pairing of community engagement with explicitly decolonizing, participative, and transformative methodologies. Similarly, considering community engagement in Indigenous and Chicano contexts, Zavala (2013) explains these problems based on "the often contradictory goals between the university and the community, the hierarchical relation of power that privileges academic over local, Indigenous knowledges, and the production of knowledge that has very little practical value to Indigenous and Raza communities" (p. 57). As universities are embedded in state interests and discourses

of Western/Modern research, they often reproduce "axes of difference and power in our society" (Zavala, 2013, p. 66) that hinder a real dialogue with Indigenous communities.

A trans-systemic dialogue requires that mainstream universities recognize that the knowledge they build and teach relates to the worldviews, symbols, histories and experiences of certain communities, most often in a euro-centric perspective. There is much that mainstream universities can learn from the Amawtay Wasi's approach where Indigenous communities are understood as knowledge holders and experts based on their worldviews, symbols, histories and experiences, which are as valid as mainstream academies. Following this model, an epistemological dialogue needs to happen with Indigenous communities' knowledges and life projects, which might differ from the modern/colonial settler life projects. While these are incommensurable by nature (Tuck & Yang, 2012), many tensions are to be expected in the negotiation of these life projects and how the universities support them. Re-centring the conversation around these communities, rather than on the institution's and the State's privileges, is the challenge of Indigenizing the academy, which implies an unsettling process where not everyone will "be happy."

Hence, an essential dimension of Indigenous community engagement that can be learned from IHE is the challenge to the knowledge asymmetry (Hall & Tandon, 2017) that exists between the academy as "experts," researchers and "knowers," and the communities as non-knowers. The Amawtay Wasi's programs all build the knowledge they teach, and the theories they produce, on the experiences and knowledges of Indigenous communities, as valid knowledge that should also be taught in the academy. Developing relationships with Indigenous communities to craft curricula and research agendas that fit their priorities in a community framework would also mean engaging with the elements that constitute these communities (stories, symbols, principles, practices, etc.) and the knowledge they build in conversation with the elements that constitute academic communities (stories, symbols, principles, practices, etc.) and the knowledge they build.

These are some of the lessons that Indigenous higher education can teach us about trans-systemic education. The frameworks need to shift from institutional and nation-state perspectives to land and community frames of conversation. A deeper engagement with the efforts and models already existing in Indigenous higher education can inform the way we try to "Indigenize" the academy.

## About the Author

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