



# It Flows from the Heart: Kiinoomaagewag nibi manidoog Ça coule du cœur : Kiinoomaagewag nibi manidoog

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Les femmes et l'eau : le flux des systèmes matriculturels

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Article abstract

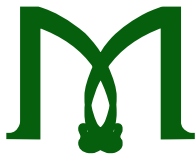
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## It Flows from the Heart: Kiinoomaagewag nibi manidoog

BARBARA MOKTTHEWENKWE WALL

### Abstract

*Through a combination of reflective, creative, and academic writing in Anishinaabemowin and English, this research article explores Kiinoomaagewag nibi manidoog—Knowledge that originates with the water spirits — and the infinite, intimate relationship between water, Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe women, the cosmos, and all of life. It explores Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe women's roles and responsibilities in the care taking of water, and the parallel responsibilities of the moon and water-related metaphysical beings. In addition, the concept of water and water spirits as relatives, teachers, and sustainers is discussed.*

**Keywords:** water, moon, Anishinaabe, cosmos

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### Résumé

*Grâce à une combinaison d'écritures réfléchies, créatives et académiques, d'anishinaabemowin et d'anglais, cet article de recherche explore Kiinoomaagewag nibi manidoog - la connaissance qui provient des esprits de l'eau - et la relation infinie et intime entre l'eau, les femmes Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe, le cosmos et toute la vie. Il explore les rôles et responsabilités des*



*femmes Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe dans la prise en charge de l'eau, ainsi que les responsabilités parallèles de la lune et des êtres métaphysiques liés à l'eau. En outre, le concept de l'eau et des esprits de l'eau en tant que parents, enseignants et soutiens est discuté.*

**Mots-clés :** eau, lune, Anishinaabe, cosmos

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Miigwech kinah gego emiigwien indinawemaaganag.<sup>1</sup> Miigwech Nibi Manidoog<sup>2</sup> for your generous loving gifts of Knowledge and guidance. Miinwaa miigwech kinah gego emiigwien Nibi.<sup>3</sup> You sustain and nurture all of life. You are our first medicine, our oldest teacher and relative. Gokmis D'bik Giizis<sup>4</sup> watches over and influences you, just as she watches over and guides us as Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag.<sup>5</sup> We honour, protect, and carry you in reciprocity for all that you are, and all that you do. G'chi miigwech.<sup>6</sup>

This article is an expression of gratitude for our relatives and shares respect for all that they provide. Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe ways of being and our Knowledges are derived through relationship with these relatives residing within Mtigwaakiing eh G'chi Zaagiganag.<sup>7</sup> Nibi,<sup>8</sup> and miskwaabik,<sup>9</sup> Gokmis D'bik Giizis, the metaphysical beings, and the spirits of the watery Anishinaabe Cosmos are elder relatives who, along with the more-than-human beings, are our teachers. This article articulates the infinite and intimate relationship between water, Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe women and all of life, discusses and demonstrates the ways in which we come to know and be known through relationality, and shares some of our ways of honouring our kinship relationships.<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> Thank you, all my relatives, for who you are and what you bring.

<sup>2</sup> Thank you, Water Spirits.

<sup>3</sup> Thank you, Water, for who you are and what you bring. Nibi is Water existing on the surface of the earth, lake or river water.

<sup>4</sup> Our grandmother, the nighttime sun; Gokmis is our grandmother, Nokmis is my grandmother. Giizis is sun. D'bik refers to night; dibikad means it is night.

<sup>5</sup> Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe women; The Bodwewaadmii are known in English as the Potawatomi and are one of the many Nations of Indigenous Peoples that comprise the Anishinaabe People. Kwewag is women; kwe is woman, or a being imbued with feminine energy. Throughout this article Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe(g) are referred to using Bodwewaadmii(g) or Anishinaabe(g) or both.

<sup>6</sup> A great thank you; thank you very much.

<sup>7</sup> The forests of the Great Lakes basin.

<sup>8</sup> Water.

<sup>9</sup> Copper; literally red rock.

<sup>10</sup> Sacred stories are not shared within this piece; I have been careful to not share details of ceremonial practices; I have shared my experiences resulting from ceremony and do this to demonstrate that ceremony is a source of knowledge.

meanings of Anishinaabemowin words and phrases are explained in footnotes at their first use.

Before articulating Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe relationality, I will follow our practices and respectfully introduce myself. The practice of sharing who we are in relation to our ancestors, the land and waters, and the spirits is essential in establishing personal accountability while acknowledging our teachers, family and community or collective Knowledges. I am the daughter of Waasey Ahnkwat-ban and Waaskwonehnsan-ban<sup>11</sup> and granddaughter of Asa Elwood Wall-ban,<sup>12</sup> a mixed ancestry, displaced and enrolled member of the federally recognized Citizen Potawatomi Nation of Shawnee Oklahoma. I was not raised in my grandfather's community, nor was I raised immersed in Anishinaabeodziwin.<sup>13</sup>

Remembering and reclaiming our ways of knowing and being is my life's work. My relationships with Elders and Knowledge Holders<sup>14</sup> are the source of stories, teachings, my learnings and growing understanding, as well as the ceremonies I have been given to carry. I am guided by my Bodwewaadmii noosewin—Moktthewenke<sup>15</sup>—and ndoodem—Waawashkesh.<sup>16</sup> My truths originate with and are inspired by relationship with Creation, our homelands along the shores of Mishii'igan<sup>17</sup> and the Cosmos. These interconnected spaces are the sources of our being—our Knowledges, Ceremonies, stories, and languages—Anishinaabeodziwin. Anishinaabemowin<sup>18</sup> is the sound of these spaces and the oral expression of our relationality. Our language holds our teachings, stories, and dreams.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The suffix -ban is used to denote a person who has died and no longer walks the earth in human form. Waasey Ahnkwat-ban is my father, Waaskwonehnsan-ban is my mother.

<sup>12</sup> My father's father was a survivor of Chilocco Indian Agricultural School in Oklahoma (then known as Indian Territory) and Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Pennsylvania. His childhood and teenage years were spent within the United States Indian Boarding School system. Asa was the last of my immediate family to live in Shawnee, Oklahoma. His mother, Rachel Johnson, is the daughter of Sophia Vieux and Jacob Johnson and the granddaughter of Louis Vieux (Menominee/Potawatomi and French) and Shanote (St. Joseph Potawatomi).

<sup>13</sup> The art of being Anishinaabe—embodying of all aspects of the Anishinaabe way of life, philosophy, psychology, culture, teachings, spirituality, customs, and history.

<sup>14</sup> These generous, loving humans include David Big Bear Johnson-ban and his brother Richard Johnson-ban, Zhngos Stewart King-ban, Gidigaa Migizi Doug Williams-ban, Lillian Rice-ban, Punkin Shananaquet, Sydney Martin, Majel DeMarsh, Andy Jackson, Brenda and Phil Shopodock, Leanne Simpson, Tim Watkinson and others.

<sup>15</sup> Bodwewaadmii name, spirit name; the spirits know me as Moktthewenkwe.

<sup>16</sup> Clan; I am related to the deer, I am deer clan.

<sup>17</sup> Lake Michigan

<sup>18</sup> Language of the Anishinaabe Peoples

<sup>19</sup> Barbara Moktthewenkwe Wall, "Anishinaabeodziwin miinwaa Gikendasswin: Anishinaabe ways of knowing and being through relationality," in *Unsettling Education: Decolonizing and Indigenizing the Land*, ed. by Patrick Lewis, Anna-Leah King and Kathleen O'Reilly (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 2024), 142.

My Elders and teachers have shared that we must look to the sound of these spaces for truth and guidance.<sup>20</sup> I work to continually wear our teachings<sup>21</sup> and in doing so choose to incorporate Anishinaabemowin<sup>22</sup> into my writing.

Reflective and reflexive thinking is essential in making meaning and the wearing of our teachings. Personal reflections are included within this article to ethically articulate my respectful engagement with Anishinaabeodziwin, Ceremony, and the learnings gained from both.

### Kinoomaagewag Nibi Manidoog

*Walking barefoot in the sand of mitaawangaang<sup>23</sup> at the eastern end of Three Mile Lake, I hear the gentle rhythmic sound of lapping waves. The heat of Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis<sup>24</sup> is strong, despite the soft cool morning breeze. I gaze over zaaga'igan<sup>25</sup> to the tall majestic zhiingwaakoog<sup>26</sup> that long ago emerged from the sandy soil and rocks of the shoreline. A thin transparent veil blurs the distant island as water transforms to rising mist. Loons swim, skimming the sparkling water as they raise their red eyes to the sky and extend their necks to sound their voices. It is here, I've been told, Maangwag<sup>27</sup> come dance. A circle of seven rising out of the water, flapping outstretched wings in unison. Naami'iwed miinwaa manidoo-nagamon<sup>28</sup> to honour Nibi Manidoog and the water beings.<sup>29</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Moktthewenkwe Barbara Wall, "Nokmisag: Bemnigying," in *Grandmothers and Grandmothering: Creative and Critical Contemplations in Honour of Our Women Elders*, ed. by Kathy Mantas (Bradford, ON: Demeter Press, 2021), 242.

<sup>21</sup> To wear our teachings is to continually embrace and apply our teachings and to strive to live in accordance with our cultural values. Edna Manitowabi, personal communication, 2011; Edna Manitowabi, INDG6600 Indigenous Knowledge Seminar, Trent University, Peterborough, ON, November 12, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> I am a committed language learner, not a fluent speaker. I predominantly use the dialect of the Wasauksing First Nation, Ontario, the home community of my husband, Zhngos Stewart King-ban. My vocabulary is supplemented by the online Ojibwe People's Dictionary, and published dictionaries by Baraga, Rhodes, and the Forest County Potawatomi Community. I choose to use words from these various to demonstrate this way of language learning. I have used the double vowel system consistently, with the exception of my name which is written as it was given to me. All mistakes are mine, and more than likely there are many.

<sup>23</sup> On the beach

<sup>24</sup> Grandfather helper the sun; Mishomis is grandfather, shkaabewis is a helper, and Giizis in the sun

<sup>25</sup> The lake or a lake

<sup>26</sup> White pines

<sup>27</sup> Loons

<sup>28</sup> They give a dance and a spiritual song

<sup>29</sup> Personal reflection of experience at Three Mile Lake, Wasauksing First Nation, 2012

We are water beings, living within a watery Cosmos. We have been nurtured, sustained and taught by Nibi and our more-than-human water being relatives since time immemorial. We have traveled the waters of the Cosmos by jiimanag<sup>30</sup> for millennia. Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabeg, and all of life, are in an infinite and intimate relationship with Nibi and the Water Spirits. Nibi in all her forms, as I understand, is a great connector and physical manifestation of life's energy. She moves within and on Shkaakmiikwe<sup>31</sup> and within us and the other beings of Creation. As Nibi flows, transforms, and cycles throughout the realms of the cosmos, she unites Creation. Metaphysical water beings protect Nibi, Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe, and the other water beings residing within Mtigwaaniing<sup>32</sup> and Gahnoowaaning.<sup>33</sup> Gokmis D'bik Giizis resides in Nangoskwaaning,<sup>34</sup> the third cosmic realm above her daughter Shkaakmiikwe. The cyclical waning and waxing of our Grandmother and Matriarch, and her pull on Creation's waters, continually guides Bodwewaadmii women's responsibilities and relationships. We are her Nooshehnsag;<sup>35</sup> our umbilical cords stretch deep, spiralling through our familial lineage from our first mother to Gokmis D'bik Giizis, and to our ancestral great grandmothers and then farther beyond to Skywoman and into the world that she created as she fell from the Skyworld through the realms of Creation.<sup>36</sup> We honour, nurture, and maintain this relationality through story, song, and ceremony and by fulfilling our responsibilities.

Our women and female-bodied<sup>37</sup> humans are life givers. We are co-creators and the only door through which new human life can enter this world.<sup>38</sup> Kwewag carry that new life surrounded and protected by Nibi within the water vessel of our wombs, just as we carry Nibi in vessels of miskwaabik. The feminine energy and life-giving abilities of Bodwewaadmii kwewag mirrors those of our first mother, Shkaakmiikwe. Through our teachings and lived experience we come to understand the Earth as ourselves.<sup>39</sup> Our

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<sup>30</sup> Canoes; jiiman(ag) is canoe(s)

<sup>31</sup> The Earth, our first mother

<sup>32</sup> Mtigwaaning is the place of the trees; mtig(oog) is tree(s)

<sup>33</sup> Gahnoowaaning is the place where the golden eagle flies; Gahnnoo is golden eagle

<sup>34</sup> Nangoskwaaning is the Starworld; nangos(ag) is star(s)

<sup>35</sup> Grandchildren (plural); *nooshehn* is grandchild

<sup>36</sup> Wall, "Nokmisag: Bemnigying," 241.

<sup>37</sup> This is to acknowledge the gender fluidity that exists within Anishinaabeodziiwin and to recognize that female-bodied humans do not necessarily identify as women.

<sup>38</sup> Edna Manitowabi. "Conversation with Edna Manitowabi, Deb McGregor and Sylvia Plain," *Re-Igniting the Sacred Power of Creation: Essential Knowledges for Transformative Action* (conference presentations, Trent University, Peterborough, ON, April 23, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Edna Manitowabi quoted in Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Pub., 2011), 36.

human vessels and the bodies of the more- than-human beings are comprised of Nibi and asinag<sup>40</sup> just like Shkaakmiikwe and Gokmis D'bik Giizis. We are all connected.

*Sitting on the rocks at the edge of the Magentawan River I gaze over the still and deep water pooled in front of me, to the fast-moving water flowing beyond. She teaches us, Nibi. Patience, perseverance, and beauty can be learned by watching her and listening to her song as she moves sometimes calmly, other times forcefully, around or over obstacles in her path.*<sup>41</sup>

Nibi shaped and created the landforms and waterways of Mtigwaakiing eh G'chi Zaaginanag.<sup>42</sup> Thus, she has shaped and created Anishinaabeodziwin as well, for the Great Lakes and eastern woodlands are not only our historic and contemporary homelands, but they are also the spiritual landscape and context of our ways of knowing and being. Mtigwaakiing eh G'chi Zaaginanag were "formed by and embedded with the regenerative potential of the First Ones who gave it form."<sup>43</sup> These First Ones are the asinag manidoog,<sup>44</sup> nibi manidoog,<sup>45</sup> and Nibi herself.<sup>46</sup> These First Ones are our ancient and original ancestors.<sup>47</sup> They are eknoomaagetag<sup>48</sup> who demonstrate and teach us that "Nishinaabeg life is continual, reciprocal, and reflective."<sup>49</sup> We gain Kiinoomaagewag aki manidoog miinwaa nibi manidoog, knowledge from our relationship with the spirits of the

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<sup>40</sup> Rock; asin(ag)

<sup>41</sup> Personal reflection of experience at Magentawan First Nation, May 2012

<sup>42</sup> Barbara Moktthewenkwe Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin* (PhD diss., Trent University, 2022), 47.

<sup>43</sup> Darlene Johnston. *Connecting People to Place: Great Lakes Aboriginal History in Cultural Context*, (Toronto, ON: Ministry of Attorney General, 2006), 6.

<sup>44</sup> Spirits of the Rocks; asin(ag) is rock(s), manidoog(g) is spirit(s)

<sup>45</sup> Water spirits, or spirits associated with water; nibi is water; manidoo(g) is spirit(s)

<sup>46</sup> Wall, "Anishinaabeodziwin," 143.

<sup>47</sup> The majority of water on earth came into being 4.5 billion years ago when our solar system was formed and before the Earth was formed. "A good fraction of terrestrial water likely formed at the very beginning of the Solar System's birth when it was a cold cloud of gas and dust, frozen and conserved during the various steps that led to the formation of planets, asteroids, and comets and was eventually transmitted to the nascent Earth." Cecilia Ceccarelli, and Du Fujun, "We Drink Good 4.5-Billion-Year-Old Water." *Elements (Quebec)* 18, no. 3 (2022): 159 <https://doi.org/10.2138/gselements.18.3.155> Water likely played a role in the sequestering of the building blocks of life onto condensing gas and dust and rocky bodies. These rocky bodies later delivered the building blocks of life to Earth during its formation. Evan Gough, "Earth's Water is 4.5 Billion Years Old," *The Universe Today*, Space and Astronomy News, accessed November 2, 2023, <https://www.universetoday.com/159204/earths-water-is-4-5-billion-years-old/>

<sup>48</sup> Teachers

<sup>49</sup> Leanne Betasamosake, *A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2021), 3.

land and the spirits of the water. Nibi manidoog lovingly gift<sup>50</sup> Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag with Kiinoomaagewag<sup>51</sup> through reciprocal relationship.

Nibi, our first medicine and nurturer of life,<sup>52</sup> is indeed a remarkable teacher,<sup>53</sup> and our oldest teacher and relative. As we observe her ability to flow and move, and to transform herself through evaporation, condensation, and sublimation into a multiple of states of being she teaches and inspires us. We learn how to nurture, how to cleanse, and that is possible to simultaneously exhibit strength, power and gentleness. We learn to use our voices for song, and that we as a reflection of both Nibi and Shkaakmiikwe are beautiful.

The Great Lakes, G'chi Zaaginanag, nurture Mno Bemaadiziwin and all beings that reside here. We are in relation with these lakes and the water they cradle. G'chi Zaaginanag carry our past, present, and future.<sup>54</sup>

## Relationality

*Our connection to Shkaakmiikwe is strong, for our umbilical cords extend beyond humanity, transcending time, space, and connection. Our cords extend into and emerge from the land and waters, extend into the future to those yet to come, and extend into the past to generations upon generations of our Grandmothers. Shkaakmiikwe is truly our mother—providing us with sustenance and nurturing—she is our first teacher, our essential source of Knowledge, relationship, understanding and beauty. We, as Anishinaabekwewag, mirror our mother. We are comprised of asin and Nibi just as she is. A fire burns intensely within us, as it does within our mother. Water is the lifeblood of our mother and of ourselves; Nibi cleanses us both, internally and externally. Water is life; water gives life. Water unites all females, all humans, and all our family of Creation. Water is the beginning; it flows from the heart.*<sup>55</sup>

Relationality and kinship are fundamental to Anishinaabeodziwin or Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe ontology; both comprise the philosophical underpinning of our intellectual

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<sup>50</sup> Wendy Geniusz, *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 67.

<sup>51</sup> Knowledges

<sup>52</sup> Wall, “Anishinaabeodziwin,” 143.

<sup>53</sup> Aimeé Craft, Anishinaabe Nibi Inaakonigewin Report (2014): 25. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3433235> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3433235>

<sup>54</sup> Wall, “Anishinaabeodziwin,” 144.

<sup>55</sup> Personal reflection, Keene, ON, March 2013. Adapted from: Wall, “It Flows for the Heart,” 103-104



tradition.<sup>56</sup> Anishinaabe People live within a great extended family that is planetary and cosmic, rather than simply human. The universe itself is a family—grandfather sun, creator, grandmother moon, mother earth.<sup>57</sup> Our relationships with Creation and the cosmos are the life force of a culturally nuanced, complex reality and the expression of gendered responsibilities and roles.<sup>58</sup> Relationality is how we make meaning. Our lands and waters, and the beings whom we live alongside within Mtigwaaning are our relations and sources of Knowledge. These relatives are our teachers and knowledge holders. We know ourselves through this relationality, and reciprocally it is through kinship that our more-than-human relatives know us.<sup>59</sup> Understanding kinship and relationality requires action and the fulfilling of responsibilities. Making meaning<sup>60</sup> involves love and reverence. Making meaning needs our “attention to the process of connection”<sup>61</sup> and understanding our place within the spaces of the cosmos. Manidookewin,<sup>62</sup> or Ceremony, facilitates this process and emphasizes love, reverence, and reciprocity.<sup>63</sup>

### **Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe Conceptualization of the Cosmos**

Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabeg’s relationality extends upwards from Shkaakmiikwe and throughout the realms of the Cosmos—Mtigwaaning, Gahnoowaaning, Nangoskwaaning and Manidoowaaning. Ininiwag,<sup>64</sup> getsijig,<sup>65</sup> mindimooyenyag<sup>66</sup> and binoojiinyag<sup>67</sup> walk within Mtigwaaning. It is here that we live, work, learn, raise our families, and hold Ceremony within the treed and watery landscapes of Mtigwaakiing eh G’chi Zaagiganag. This place of the trees, Mtigwaaniing, mookijiwanibiigoon,<sup>68</sup> ziibiwan and ziibinsan<sup>69</sup> and zaagiganag is the first realm of the Cosmos. Our elder relatives—the trees, food plants,

<sup>56</sup> Barbara Moktthewenkwe Wall, “Living and Dying mno bemaadiziiwin: Wearing Our Teachings in Contemporary Times,” *Turtle Island Journal of Indigenous Health*, Vol. 1 No. 3 (November 9, 2023): page 2 <https://doi.org/10.33137/tijih.v1i3.38501>

<sup>57</sup> Lea Foushee and Renee Gurneau, *Sacred Water, Water for Life*. (Lake Elmo, MN: North American Water Office, 2010): 98-100.

<sup>58</sup> Patricia Dudgeon and Abigail Bray, "Indigenous Relationality: Women, Kinship and the Law" *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019): 2 – 3, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3020023>

<sup>59</sup> Lauren Tynan, What is relationality? Indigenous knowledges, practices and responsibilities with kin. *Cultural Geographies*, 28(4), (2019): 597-610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14744740211029287>

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen Absolon, *Kaandossiwin: How We Come to Know: Indigenous Re-search Methodologies*. (Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2022)

<sup>61</sup> Patricia Dudgeon and Abigail Bray, "Indigenous Relationality: Women, Kinship and the Law" *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019.): 3, 8. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3020023>

<sup>62</sup> Ceremony; the art of having spiritual power and conducting a ceremony

<sup>63</sup> Dudgeon, Patricia, and Abigail Bray. 2019. "Indigenous Relationality: Women, Kinship and the Law" *Genealogy* 3, no. 2 (2019): 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy3020023>

<sup>64</sup> Men; inini is man

<sup>65</sup> Elder(s); Getsig is Elder, Getsijig is Elders

<sup>66</sup> Older women; mindimooyen is an older woman, mindimooyenyag is older women

<sup>67</sup> Children; binoojiinhs is a child, binoojiinyag is children

and medicines— and our water-being relatives and the more-than-human beings<sup>70</sup> reside here as well. The water being relatives include giigoohnyag,<sup>71</sup> turtles, gnebigoo,<sup>72</sup> shishiibag,<sup>73</sup> maangwag and other water birds.

*Enveloped in nagamonan<sup>74</sup> of the orioles, I sit here—jiigibiig,<sup>75</sup> a liminal space existing along the water's edge, the transition between worlds physical and spiritual. Reflections of Mtigwaaning join Nibi and sky. The medicine of mookijwanibiig is encircled by shining white sand, glowing through clear turquoise water. Nibiseh Manidoosag<sup>76</sup> and Nokmisag dance together adorned in green, singing ancient songs. The circle of old ones faces inwards toward the source of life, knowledge and sustenance. Joy and connection honour her.*

*My song lifts with the spiral of pwaagan aatig,<sup>77</sup> both echoing of the spiral of life and the simultaneity of time. Animikii binesiag<sup>78</sup> add their voices preparing to bring water from the skyworld. Their arrival expands that sacred liminal space. Jiigibiig and Mtigwaaning transform into the green fire of Waasnode,<sup>79</sup> and the wind picks up carrying prayers, smoke, and gratitude.<sup>80</sup>*

Michi Shibzhii, the underwater panther,<sup>81</sup> is the leader of the water beings and a metaphysical being or Manidoo. Other manidoog travel into and out of Mtigwaaning depending on the seasonal cycle, the faces of Gokmis D'bik Giizis, and when they might be called on by the Bodwewaadmii for assistance. Seven kwewag manidoog, helpers to Gokmis D'bik Giizis, watch over the waters of Mtigwaaning and work to heal and protect Shkaakmiikwe, Nibi in all her forms and the grandchildren of Gokmis—the Bodwewaadmiig. One watches over mookijwanibiigoon, another is the caretaker of ziibiwan and ziibinsan, and another takes care of G'chi Zaagiganag. Three others watch

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<sup>68</sup> Springs; mookijwanibiigoon is springs, mookijwanibiig is one spring. Mokthwen is spring using the Bodwewaadmii dialect of Anishinaabemowin.

<sup>69</sup> Rivers and streams/creeks; ziibi(wan) is river(s), ziibins(an) is stream(s)/creek(s)

<sup>70</sup> These beings include the crawlers and insects, birds, and four leggeds

<sup>71</sup> Fish (plural); giigohn is a singular fish

<sup>72</sup> Snakes (plural); gnebig is a singular snake

<sup>73</sup> Ducks (plural); shiishib is a singular duck

<sup>74</sup> Songs

<sup>75</sup> Shore of a lake or body of water

<sup>76</sup> Water spirits

<sup>77</sup> Pipe stem; pwaagan is a ceremonial pipe, aatig is the stem or stick

<sup>78</sup> Thunderbirds; Animikii is a thunderer, binesi(wag) are bird(s)

<sup>79</sup> The fire that burns from afar; Northern Lights, *aurora borealis*

<sup>80</sup> Personal reflection, Pokégnék Bodéwadmik Akiing, August 2016. First published in my dissertation, modified for this article. Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 299.

<sup>81</sup> The underwater panther; Michi means someone with great spiritual power, Shibzhii is a cougar, panther or mountain lion.

over Nibi that transcends Mtigwaaning and Gahnoowaaning—aankwatoon and awan,<sup>82</sup> gimiwan,<sup>83</sup> and goon.<sup>84</sup> The seventh kwewag manidoog is responsible for birth water, the water within a woman's womb when she is carrying new life. Pregnant women, as co-creators spiritually reside in Gahnoowaaning.

Bodwewaadmii oral tradition tell us of Michi Shibzhii and their incredible strength and abilities to travel both through the waters of Mtigwaaning as well as through the soil and rock of Shkaakmiikwe.<sup>85</sup> Other stories share that it is Michi Shibzhii that gifted our ancestors with Miskwaabik for medicine and healing.<sup>86</sup>

Miskwaabik, created deep within Shkaakmiikwe by Nibi, resides on and below her surface in Mtigwaakiing eh G'chi Zaagiganag. Miskwaabik carries Knowledge of the subterranean layers of the cosmos within Shkaakmiikwe and like Nibi, is medicine transmitting healing and spiritual energy as well as Knowledges.<sup>87</sup>

### **Miskwaabik miinwaa Nibi**

Prior to the shaping of Mtigwaakiing eh G'chi Zaagiganag by Nibi as mikwam,<sup>88</sup> magmatic Nibi assisted in the formation of the asinag of Shkaakmiikwe. Nibi heated by the fire within Shkaakmiikwe and in the form of mineralising hydrothermal fluids injected pure Miskwaabik into the cracks and crevices of the basaltic rocks that now comprise much of the land adjacent to and south of Anishinaabewi G'chi Gamii.<sup>89,90</sup> I understand the deep connection between Miskwaabik and Nibi and acknowledge native copper as one of the gifts lovingly given to the Bodwewaadmi from the lands and manidoog of Great Lakes and eastern woodlands.

Miskwaabik, formed by water and formed into vessels by Anishinaabeg, is used to gather and carry Nibi. My teachers from the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi teachers have shared that Miskwaabik is the gift Shkaakmiikwe gives us; it is “the gift we need to use” to purify, gather and carry Nibi.<sup>91</sup> Majel DeMarsh speaks of the beauty of this generous gift and how our people have used Miskwaabik for healing and many other ways. Our oral tradition

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<sup>82</sup> Clouds and fog; aankwat(oon) is cloud(s), awan is fog

<sup>83</sup> Rain

<sup>84</sup> Snow

<sup>85</sup> Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 55.

<sup>86</sup> Sutherland and Moose, “Anang Gikendaasowinan.”

<sup>87</sup> Wall, “Anishinaabeodziiwin,” (forthcoming)

<sup>88</sup> Ice

<sup>89</sup> Lake Superior, or the Great Lake of the Anishinaabeg

<sup>90</sup> Ron Morton and Carl Gawboy, *Talking Rocks, Geology and 10,000 years of Native American Tradition in the Lake Superior Region*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 85 and 90.

<sup>91</sup> Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 335.

tells us that an Anishinaabekwe was gifted copper by Nibi Manidoog. She brought Miskwaabik to her family and community to be used as medicine—to take away the pain in their bones, strengthen their spiritual senses and lengthen their lifespans, and to make tools and purify water.<sup>92</sup> In reciprocity and with love Bodwewaadmii Nokmisag,<sup>93</sup> Aunties, nimiseniyag,<sup>94</sup> cousins, and older siblings mirror the generosity of Shkaakmiikwe and Michi Shibzhii by gifting oshkibinoojiinhyag<sup>95</sup> with a copper cup. According to Punkin Shananaquet from the Gun Lake Pottawatomi community, this gift signifies our newborns' connection to and intimate relationship with water. Punkin shares that “babies were in that water realm for nine months and it is the water that breaks and cleanses that [path for the] sacred life to come and be part of this mother earth place. That little child should have that cup from the moment of [their] appearance on Earth.”<sup>96</sup> This physical gift is a reminder of our water teachings—Miskwaabik is the only material that can hold and honour the sacred gift of Nibi.<sup>97</sup>

*Gii'igoshimowin. There are several of us simultaneously fasting here at Na Nawe Gwan.<sup>98</sup> At sunrise and sunset, our songs drift through the maples to each other's ears and hearts. In the darkness of night, nagamonan<sup>99</sup> bring healing and connection. My circle is away from the others and near moktthewen, my namesake. Their circles are up the hill near ishkode, the central fire. Each of us are here for our own reasons seeking Knowledge, healing, understanding or all three.*

*Animikii Binesiwag visit throughout the afternoon of our third day. As they approach sounding their voices, I take my miskwaabik akik<sup>100</sup> from my bundle and place it on Aki,<sup>101</sup> remembering the teachings of my Elders. Semaa<sup>102</sup> is offered in gratitude and reciprocity—Animikii Binesiyag bring energized Nibi to be gathered and used in Ceremony. Downpour after downpour of gimiwan fill miskwaabik akik, and seep through the seams of my tent floor.*

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<sup>92</sup> Abe Sutherland, “Anang Gikendaasowinan miinawaa Nekaanag,” IESS 1001H: Foundations in Indigenous Environmental Studies and Sciences (Class Lecture, Trent University, Peterborough, ON, January 29, 2019).

<sup>93</sup> Grandmothers

<sup>94</sup> Sisters

<sup>95</sup> Newborn babies; oshkibinoojiinhsag is plural, oskhibinoojiin is singular, literally new child

<sup>96</sup> Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 336.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> The centre of it all, the centre of the meeting place; near Campbellsport, Wisconsin.

<sup>99</sup> Songs

<sup>100</sup> Container

<sup>101</sup> Refers to the earth, or land, ground

<sup>102</sup> Tobacco

*Gratefully, day four begins clear and hot. I spread my blankets and sleeping bag out over the small trees and bushes of the understory. The heat dries them and my thirst returns. I ignore Nibi waiting in the akik. It is for those who are finishing today to break their fasts.*<sup>103</sup>

Anishinaabekwewag respectfully gather water from mookijiwanibiigoon, ziibiwan, ziibinsan and Zaagiganag in vessels made of Miskwaabik. Nibi for Ceremony is stored and carried in Miskwaabik Akikoog.<sup>104</sup> Also, Miskwaabik Akikoog are placed outside on the ground at the first sound of approaching Animikii Binesiwaag to collect their gift of energized Nibi falling from Gahnoowaaning.

### **Gahnoowaaning, Animikii Binesiwaag miinwaa Nibi**

Nibi transcends and transforms herself throughout the Bodwewaadmii Cosmos. Her transformation is fueled by Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis, who resides in Nangoskwaaning. Nibi flows in liquid form and sometimes accumulates as ice or snow within Mtigwaaning. She forms aankwatoon in, and falls as gimiwan, goon and/or mikwamiikaag<sup>105</sup> from Gahnoowaaning. Gahnoowaaning is the place where the Golden Eagle flies. Gahnoowaaning is also the Cosmic realm of Animikii Binesiwaag, and niwiiwaag noodin,<sup>106</sup> as well as the spiritual realm of kwewag carrying new life.

Animikii Binesiwaag are powerful Nibi Manidoog who cleanse the skies and the land in preparation for the return of Gete Anishinaabeg.<sup>107</sup> Their arrival in either Ziigwaan or Mnookmik<sup>108</sup> is an important and greatly anticipated event in the Anishinaabe seasonal round and is acknowledged by offerings. Majel DeMarsh feasts Animikii Binesiwaag on their return with giigoonh and semaa. Punkin Shananaquet's Nokmis would offer cedar and prayers. Punkin shared this story:

Whenever the Thunders would come, Nana would put cedar on her little woodstove to make the house smell like cedar and burn cedar for the Thunder people. She would listen to the radio and if there was a tornado warning she would burn her cedar, and she'd say, "I do this so those Cloud people, those

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<sup>103</sup> Personal Reflection, Na Nawe Gwan, Nibiin, 2017. First published in my dissertation, modified for this article. Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 330.

<sup>104</sup> Pails, kettles or containers of metal for holding liquids

<sup>105</sup> Hail

<sup>106</sup> The four Winds; niwiiwaag indicates that there are four, noodin is wind, or it is windy

<sup>107</sup> The old ones, Anishinaabe Ancestral Spirits

<sup>108</sup> Ziigwaan is early Spring when the ice and snow is beginning to melt; Mnookmik is Spring, the time when the road gets easier and gentler.

tornadoes, won't come harm us, they will travel around us and won't come be part of their—" she called it their cleansing. She didn't refer to it as a destructive thing, or a life-taking thing. She just said it was a cleansing and that they have to do their work. So, she never talked negative of anything. She always tried to turn it into a positive. When she lit the cedar, it would tell them not to come here and hurt us. They would go around us. We were never worried about it.<sup>109</sup>

Stewart King-ban spoke with me about his parents' practices of offering semaa—placing it on the ground at the first sound of approaching thunder to express gratitude for the gift of rain, and the cleansing of the skies and land. They would be asked to avoid damaging the family home or garden as they did their cleansing work. King-ban's family would sit in silence, listening to the voices, stories, and teachings of Animikii Binesiwag as they flew over.<sup>110</sup>

*Gii'igoshimowin. I am alone, surrounded by Manidoog and Nokmisag. Ishkode<sup>111</sup> burned bright, at naawakwe,<sup>112</sup> despite the soggy ground and Nibi dripping from the tree leaves. Smoke rises with my offerings and gratitude. I have been shown many things as night has spiralled into day three times. It is nearly time for my third fire of the day. A quickening wind begins to turn the leaves underside up, yet the sky remains bright blue.*

*The sound of an approaching vehicle interrupts my solitude, and I leave my fasting circle to meet my supporter. Smiling, he hands me dry blankets. There is concern on his face as he speaks softly of what I've experienced sitting here in this space just upslope of mookijwanibiig. With affirming words, he reminds me I can end my fast before nightfall, the others have finished. Shaking my head, I decline; I have one more sleep here. He gently touches my arm, "You should know we are under a tornado watch." I shake my head again, knowing I will be safe and protected. Returning to my circle, I open the cedar pathway and step inside. As I light ishkode, the sky fills with dark clouds. Semaa, song and prayers follow, and I settle into my tent with the rumble of thunder. Animikii Binesiyag arrive.*

*Blinding lightning accompanies their ground shaking voices. Nibi streams from the sky, turning the air white as if it is raining milk. Semaa, songs and prayers continue as with the intensity of the storm. I hold my breath and semaa tightly.*

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<sup>109</sup> Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 381–382.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 359–360.

<sup>111</sup> Fire

<sup>112</sup> Noon

*It is eerily quiet as the storm suddenly ceases. The air is fresh, cleansed and electric. All of Creation sighs, and we return to normal breathing as the slanted rays of a setting sun shines between wet trees. The birds begin to sing, and it's a song different from their usual evening concert. There is an intensity and joy that is uplifting; it sounds as if every bird in existence has surrounded moktthewen and my circle to sing. With nightfall, the bird song quiets and what seems like a chorus of thousands of tree frogs join in this celebration of Nibi, this celebration of life.*<sup>113</sup>

Nibi and Nibi Manidoog connect Shkaakmiikwe, Mtigwaaning and Gahnoowaaning. The lightning that flashes from the eyes of Animikii Binesiwag<sup>114</sup> energizes the falling rain and thus the land, nurturing and preparing the soil for planting. Rainwater collected in during thunderstorms is used to water seeds, seedlings and our gardens.

### **Nangoskwaaning, Gokmis D'bik Giizis miinwaa Nibi**

Nangoskwaaning, the Starworld, is the third cosmic realm skyward from Shkaakmiikwe. One of our many creation stories share that we and our clans have come from the stars, just as Nibi has. Our water clans are the star gazers and star- and sky-related knowledge holders. Gokmis D'bik Giizis and Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis reside here, along with our Nekaanag,<sup>115</sup> Jiibay Miikaan,<sup>116</sup> the celestial bodies of Odoodemaking,<sup>117</sup> and Waasnoode.<sup>118</sup> These sky relatives guide Anishinaabeodziiwin with their physical and spiritual presence. Nekaanag are physical manifestations and symbolic representations of our Nibi-related oral tradition. Seasonal Nekaanag<sup>119</sup> remind us of our relationship with

<sup>113</sup> Personal reflection, Na Nawe Gwan, Wisconsin, June 2017. Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 396.

<sup>114</sup> David W. Penney and Gerald McMaster, *Before and after the Horizon, Anishinaabe Artists of the Great Lakes*, (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of the American Indian, 2013), 37; Amy Rosenbrough and BobbieMalone, *Water Panther, Bears and Thunderbirds, Exploring Wisconsin's Effigy Mounds* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2003), 3; Basil Johnston, *Tales the Elders Told, Ojibway Legends* (Toronto: Royal Ontario Museum, 1981), 40.

<sup>115</sup> Constellations. According to Miishikenh Abe Sutherland there is no Anishinaabemowin word that translates to the English word constellation(s). He uses Nekaanag, or relations, to refer to constellations. Anishinaabeg came from the stars and the relationship between individual stars that form images in the sky reflect our clan relationships.

Abe Sutherland, "Anang Gikendaasowinan miinawaa Nekaanag."

<sup>116</sup> The Milky Way; also known as Mashkiki Miikaan

<sup>117</sup> Our solar system

<sup>118</sup> Northern Lights (*aurora borealis*); also known as Waawaate in northern dialects of Anishinaabemowin

<sup>119</sup> Seasonal nekaanag are known from the western science perspective as non-circumpolar constellations. These Nekaanag rise above the horizon in the east and set in the west, below the horizon, with the seasons.

Nibi and to live within the seasonal round. A visual image of Michi Shibzhii rises in Nangoskwaanig around Zigwaan to guide us from our winter camps to the sugar bush. Michi Shibzhii's appearance also reminds us that the lake and river ice will soon be unsafe to travel on. Madoodiswan<sup>120</sup> is visible early spring to late fall during times of Ceremony and fasting. Animikii Binesiwag Nekaanag fills the summer sky accompanied by Animikii Wazison Nekaanag.<sup>121</sup> Both signal the arrival of the Thunderbirds, and the new life of the spring season.<sup>122</sup>

Gokmis D'bik Giizis and Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis travel from east to west within Nangoskwaanig. Our stories and teachings tell us of the multi-generational kinship relationships between our relatives in Nangoskwaanig and feminine entities and kwewag—when Shkaakmiikwe 'was young, she had a family . . . and was filled with beauty.' The moon is called Grandmother, and the sun Grandfather<sup>123</sup> or Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis. Together these celestial entities manifest the duality of day and night.<sup>124</sup> Gokmis D'bik Giizis is bemnigying,<sup>125</sup> she was created at the beginning of time to guide the Anishinaabeg.<sup>126</sup> She is a wise and loving matriarch and teacher, a mother and grandmother—holding us up while raising us and continually watching over both her daughter, Shkaakmiikwe, and countless generations of her grandchildren, the Anishinaabeg.<sup>127</sup> Gokmis watches in particular over our women,<sup>128</sup> as well as our men while protecting our children.<sup>129</sup> In times of darkness she guides men's paths,<sup>130</sup> "casting the light of knowledge . . . alone, man is backwards and undeveloped. He needs the light that women give him to make him whole."<sup>131</sup>

I understand Gokmis D'bik Giizis is a Knowledge Holder because of her lived experience and what she can observe from her position in Nangoskwaanig. Anishinaabe Elder Sherry Copenace agrees, "she can tell you much more than any human being could ... everything you need to know is really with her."<sup>132</sup> Gokmis teaches all beings to live in balance with

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<sup>120</sup> The Sweat Lodge

<sup>121</sup> Thunderbird's Nest

<sup>122</sup> Abe Sutherland and Mary Moose, "Anang Gikendaasowinan," First Peoples House of Learning Traditional Teaching (Trent University, Peterborough, ON, January 30, 2019).

<sup>123</sup> Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book, The Voice of the Ojibway* (Hayward, WI: Red School House, 1988), 2.

<sup>124</sup> Wall, "Anishinaabeodziwin," 150.

<sup>125</sup> Those who hold us up, carry us; also to carry a child and raise them.

<sup>126</sup> Susan Chiblow, "Relationships and responsibilities between Anishinaabek and Nokomis Giizis (Grandmother Moon inform N'bi (Water) Governance," *Alternative* 2023, 19 no. 2 (2023): 284, <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801231173114>.

<sup>127</sup> Benton-Banai, *Mishomis*, 18.

<sup>128</sup> Women, and female-bodied humans

<sup>129</sup> Benton-Banai, *Mishomis*, 18., and Basil Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage*, 26.

<sup>130</sup> Johnston, *Ojibway Heritage*, 26.

<sup>131</sup> Benton-Banai, *Mishomis*, 37.

<sup>132</sup> Chiblow, "Relationships," 288.



and within the seasonal round. Her thirteen annual cycles of guide the growth of our elder relatives, the food and medicine plants, and influence the spawning of fish and birthing cycles of the four-leggeds.<sup>133</sup> We, nooshehnsag,<sup>134</sup> gather Kinoowaabimin<sup>135</sup> as we observe the relationship between Gokmis D'bik Giizis and our more-than-human relatives. Our survivance is intimately tied to this relationship and our application of the knowledges of when to plant, forage, harvest,<sup>136</sup> hunt and fish. The twenty-eight-day transformation cycle of Gokmis' phases is sacred and dependant on her relationship with Shkaakmiikwe and Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis. Her many faces reflect these relationships and reveal times of "great power, [Ceremony,] planting, meditating, and fasting."<sup>137</sup> She first appears as a very thin sliver of a crescent that slowly grows from the right into a half circle. Gokmis' physical presence increases until she reveals her full face. It is at this time when women fulfill their responsibilities<sup>138</sup> and gather in Ceremony. Gokmis' full face gradually fades to the left forming a half circle and very thin sliver of a crescent before fading to complete darkness. It is at this time of the New Moon when her presence is unseen; she is at her strongest spiritual strength and closest to her partner Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis. This single night in the twenty-eight-day transformation cycle dictates a pause in the work of spiritual workers; it is time to rest and heal, and to renew.<sup>139</sup> The cycle of Gokmis' phases, and each individual face measures the passing of time. Gokmis teaches us that we as women are an essential part of creation and connected to her through our cycles that coincide with her cycles.<sup>140</sup>

The kinship and interconnection between Nibi, Gokmis D'bik Giizis, Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis and the Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabeg is undeniable. Gokmis guides the movement

<sup>133</sup> Erin Wayman, "Moonlight shapes how some animals move, grown and even sing," Science News, July 8, 2019. <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/moon-animals-light-behavior-lunar-phases>

<sup>134</sup> Grandchildren

<sup>135</sup> Knowledges gained through observation

<sup>136</sup> Kristiina Vogt, Karen H Beard, Shira Hammann, Jennifer O'Hara Palmiotto, Daniel J Vogt, Frederick N Scatena, and Brooke P Hecht, "Indigenous Knowledge Informing Management of Tropical Forests: The Link between Rhythms in Plant Secondary Chemistry and Lunar Cycles," *Ambio* 31, no. 6 (2002): 485. <https://doi.org/10.1579/0044-7447-31.6.485>; Mere Roberts, F. Weko and L. Clarke, "Maramataka: the Maori Moon Calendar." Research Report No. 283, Matauranga Maori and Bio Protecting Research Team, National Centre for Advance Bio-Protection Technologies, Lincoln University, Canterbury, NZ 2006, <https://researcharchive.lincoln.ac.nz/server/api/core/bitstreams/6eb5e823-90ba-4063-b596-100e293fe183/content>

<sup>137</sup> Benton-Banai, *Mishomis*, 36 -37. Our ancestral relatives, Nekaanag, the seasonal and circumpolar constellations guide seasonal responsibilities also reveal times of great power.

<sup>138</sup> Chiblow shares research participant Angela Day's comment "Full Moon ceremonies is a responsibility" on page 287, and also quotes Christine Agawa who rationalizes Full Moon ceremonies as a method of "getting back to honouring, recognizing, and acknowledging the work that she [the moon] does for the earth."

Chiblow, "Relationships," 287.

<sup>139</sup> Stewart King-ban, personal communication.

<sup>140</sup> Chiblow, "Relationships," 287-288.

of Nibi on and within her daughter, influencing the ocean and lake tides. As Gokmis pulls on Nibi and collects her from Shkaakmiikwe, Nibi flows through the umbilical cord of all kwewag.<sup>141</sup> These mutual connections to the lakes and oceans and the rhythms of life within our kwewag continually emphasize our essential relationality and remind us of our understanding of ourselves and our reciprocal responsible relationships to land, water, and all of Creation.<sup>142</sup> Gokmis D'bik Giizis' faces reflect the light and energy of Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis. He lights our daily path from east to west pausing only momentarily at the center of the sky to remind the Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabeg to also pause and be in the present, and to gaze around us to see all that we have been given. Mishomis resides, as does Gokmis, in Nangoskwaanang where both influence Nibi. The fire of Mishomis is the fuel that drives the transformative cycle of Nibi within Mtigwaanang and Gahnoowaanang as she changes her physical form from lakes and oceans to fog, clouds, rain, ice, and snow.<sup>143</sup>

Our kinship relationship with Gokmis D'bik Giizis and Mishomis is celebrated and honoured through Manidookewin, or Ceremony.

## Manidookewin

*Smoke from burning sage wafts upward from a long-used abalone shell, there is an unmistakable and comforting scent drifting eastward with the wind blowing against my back. The Spirits have joined us—full of gratitude for our presence and offerings—while clear, Sacred Water reflects a blue sky from its vessel of copper. As I lift Nibi to the four directions, singing to her and for her, the voices of the Old Ones echo from within Miskwaabik Akik. They are singing too.*<sup>144</sup>

When Gokmis D'bik Giizis is at her strongest physical presence she appears complete – a silver circle shining in the night sky. At this time, the seven kwewag manidoog, our grandmother's helpers who watch over Nibi in Mtigwaanang, ascend into the Skyworld from their earth-bound water-related responsibilities and encircle Gokmis d'bik giizis, dancing around her. Together they hold ceremony. These manidoog bring healing to Nibi and to the kwewag on earth who simultaneously gather in a ceremonial circle. Each circle mirrors the other. We and all life are connected through water. After Ceremony and until

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>142</sup> Dawn Zinga and Sandra Styres, "Coming Full Circle: Looking to Grandmother Moon," *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation* 36, no. 2 (2013): 313.

<sup>143</sup> Wall, "Anishinaabeodziwin," 150.

<sup>144</sup> Personal reflection, Ceremony at Catfish Lake, Algonquin Provincial Park. Originally published in my dissertation and adapted for this article. Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 5.

the Gokmis' full face appears again in twenty-eight days, these Nibi Manidoog are lowered back to Mtigwaaning to do their work for the next cycle.

The practice of Full Moon Ceremony is generally consistent across Bodwewaadmiig, yet the details vary with each Ceremony facilitator's teachings and methods. It is my understanding that those holding collective ceremony may include kwewag within nuclear or extended families, and within a wider community. Others hold Ceremony alone as an individual. In the circumstance of Full Moon ceremonies, the sacred fire can be lit and kept by firekeepers of all genders.<sup>145</sup> Punkin Shananaquet spoke with me about the balance of ishkodé<sup>146</sup> and Nibi within the Full Moon Ceremony. She shared that Nibi is the prominent part of that teaching. Nibi is blessed and honored by the presence of Gokmis D'bik Giizis at her utmost physical strength. Gokmis acknowledges Nibi and odeminan<sup>147</sup> that are brought to ceremony. "When we lift that water and bring it back down through those four levels of the Skyworld, it becomes medicine. And it is the same with the berry."<sup>148</sup> Punkin holds Full Moon Ceremony within her community. Her experience at one Ceremony speaks to the depth of learning and knowledge that can be experienced at Ceremony, and its application into our daily lives:

At last night's full moon there was something revealed that I had really never noticed before. I was able to see the relationship within that circle of Full Moon Ceremony participants, the four sacred directions and our path of life as kwewag. New life comes in from waabanoong.<sup>149</sup> In Ceremony you can feel that Spirit of Oshki bemaadizit<sup>150</sup> is there. And then as we travel to Zhaawanoong,<sup>151</sup> we experience what it is like to be a young person again. As we make our way to Epgishmok,<sup>152</sup> we as Nokmisag and mothers understand what it is to experience life. And when we look to Giwedinoong,<sup>153</sup> we see where we are going to be as Nokmisag. And then as we circle back fully to Waabanoong we feel the manidoog are working to show us about life, continuity and continuation. The manidoog also show us that the path of ishkodé is related to Nibi because the sacred water altar is placed there by that Grandfather. As we travel to that path where Nibi and odeminan sit in relationship to ishkodé, and when we place our Spirit there, we are placing our physical-self next to that path of life. We see this relationship and experience

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<sup>145</sup> Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 340.

<sup>146</sup> Fire; referred to as Grandfather or Mishomis

<sup>147</sup> Strawberries

<sup>148</sup> Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 342.

<sup>149</sup> The eastern direction

<sup>150</sup> New life

<sup>151</sup> The southern direction

<sup>152</sup> The western direction

<sup>153</sup> The northern direction

these teachings only in Full Moon Ceremony, only one time a month can we experience the feeling of being so close to our path of life.

Gokmis D'bik Giizis looks down on us as her granddaughters and she can feel you, hear you and sense you as well as hear your prayer, and intentions. It is our relationship with Gokmis and how she works with the waters of all the Creation that creates this understanding. Full Moon ceremony is a women's Ceremony because kwewag are givers of life and carriers of the water. Gokmis plays a role in the Nibi teachings, with the life giving of abilities of Nibi. She influences all of Creation in that work that she does each and every month. When she turns her beautiful full face and acknowledges her daughter the Earth, and she acknowledges us as her granddaughters.<sup>154</sup>

### **Kinoomaagewag Nibi Manidoog**

Manidookewin is a source of understanding. We make meaning in Ceremony as we experience and understand our place within the spaces of the Cosmos:

*The cool dampness of dew seeps through the soles of my moccasins as I quietly walk across the grass to ishkodé blazing brightly in the darkness. Gokmis D'bik Giizis, her full face reflecting off the still water of the bay, casts her light coating zhiingwaak in silver. Biidaaban<sup>155</sup> arrives as we gather in a circle. The eastern sky lightens. Mishomis Shkaabewis Giizis slowly rises in Waabanoong while Gokmis gently descends to the western horizon. The duality of Creation is exposed, horizon to horizon, in the lavender of early morning. Their partnership is palpable. Our grandparents envelope us, in turn we envelope Ishkode miinwaa Nibi. We are complete. We know that we belong.<sup>156</sup>*

When we realize and acknowledge our place within the Cosmos, we grow in our understanding of relationality and kinship relationships. Shkaakmiikwe is our first mother; we mirror her because we too are made of asinag and Nibi, and we birth and sustain new life. Nibi is our first medicine and teacher, she is the physical manifestation of the energy of life. Nibi flows on and within Shkaakmiikwe while she shares her Knowledges and lived experience. As spirits in human form, we learn to navigate obstacles, to cleanse our bodies and minds, to sing, and to nurture and sustain life through our intimate and infinite relationship with Nibi and her helpers.

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<sup>154</sup> Adapted from quote by Punkin Shananaquet in Wall, *It Flows from the Heart: Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabekwewag Nibi Waawiindmowin*, 343.

<sup>155</sup> Daybreak, dawn is coming

<sup>156</sup> Personal reflection of experience at annual Potawatomi Gathering at Wasauksing First Nation, August 2001.

Seven feminine Nibi Manidoog watch over the various sources of water, protecting her and thus our lives and all of life. These manidoog transcend Mtigwaaning, Gahnoowaaning and Nangoskwaaning just as Nibi, herself connects the Cosmic realms. Gokmis D'bik Giizis is our doting grandmother who watches over her daughter, Shkaakmiikwe, and generations of grandchildren, the Bodwewaadmii Anishinaabe. She illuminates Mtigwaaning with her loving silver light, protecting our families. Gokmis pulls on and regulates Nibi's tidal movements of G'chi Zaagiganag and the ocean. The seasonal cycle of Gokmis D'bik Giizis guides our lives here in Mtigwaaning with help from Nekaanag. The cycles of our kwewag coincide with Gokmis' twenty-eight-day transformative cycle—from her strongest spiritual strength during the sole night of darkness to her full physical strength when her face is a silver circle and then back to spiritual strength. Our kwewag mirror and gain knowledge from Gokmis.

## About the Author

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