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Resisting the White Settler Colonial Nation-State: Lessons From Indigenous Land-Based Teachings and Their Implications for Social Work Education

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Abstract

Land-based teachings are normatively understood as being unique to Indigenous philosophy, ethics, and politics. Liberal political realities and worldviews, particularly as they appear in normative scholarship on the welfare state and social work, treat land as an uninterrogated blank space that is uninformed by everyday social work practices. In this article I argue that the white settler colonial welfare state as a (neo) liberal political project is grounded in and even defined by land-based assumptions, at the level of discourse and practice, that deeply inform state and, by extension, social work practices. I examine creation stories of the Haudenosaunee people as well as from Christian and liberal Enlightenment sources, which are all land-based, to extract differing visions that guide their everyday practices. Taking my cue from Indigenous land-based teachings, I offer four lessons that can be learned by social work educators seeking to include reconciliation as part of their decolonizing pedagogy: (a) politicizing critical social work education by linking it to land-based practices; (b) understanding socially just social work practices as horizontal in nature and across multiple nations; (c) viewing social work-client relationships in terms of reciprocal gift relationships; and (d) incorporating a cyclical view of time in their practice.

Keywords: land-based teachings, Indigenous knowledge, reconciliation, social work pedagogy

Introduction

Social workers act as an arm of western welfare states. It is therefore necessary for students of social work to gain familiarity with the colonizing practices of white colonial settler countries like Canada as these have an impact on everyday social work practices. As a woman of colour who is a newcomer and an uninvited settler on Turtle Island, a process of my own decolonization has been to learn from land-based teachings of Indigenous Peoples in a respectful way. Being respectful has meant for me examining my own assumptions about how I conceive of relationships with land and learning from Indigenous land-based stories to further politicize my own decolonizing practices in relation to my teaching and research, and as a social work practitioner, in ways that include Indigenous land-based teachings. The focus of this article is on practices of white settler colonialism through the perspective of Indigenous land-based teachings, and it is my hope that all students, Indigenous and otherwise, will find it relevant to furthering their understandings of decolonizing social work education and practice. By focusing on

land, both in terms of what it has to teach us and as a part of the colonial capitalist enterprise, I want to draw attention to the nation-building processes of white settler colonialism that have been an essential part of engendering the Canadian welfare state.

Land-based teachings are normatively understood as being unique to Indigenous philosophy, ethos, and politics. Liberal political realities and worldviews, particularly as they appear in normative scholarship on the welfare state and social work, treat land as an uninterrogated blank, a space that is uninformed by everyday social work practices (Moosa-Mitha, 2016, 2017). In fact, as I argue in this article, the white settler colonial welfare state as a racialized (neo-) liberal political project is grounded in, and even defined by, land-based assumptions at the level of discourse and practice that deeply inform state and, by extension, social work practices. As Tuck et al. (2014) attested, unlike colonialism more generally, white settler colonialism "is a form of colonization in which outsiders come to land inhabited by Indigenous Peoples and claim it as their own new home … at the heart of all this is the need for space and land" (p. 6). Yet as Tuck et al. (2014) and Veracini (2011) argued, white settler colonial states refuse to recognize their settler status and the centrality of land-based claims that characterize their societies. The mystification of the land-based nature of settler colonization is deliberate as a justification for settling on lands that were already settled.

Over the course of this article, as part of my decolonizing analysis, I examine the creation stories that are a part of the discursive tropes used by white settler colonials to justify and obfuscate colonial violence and the racist assumptions within which they are couched, and I uncover some of the worst excesses of white settler colonialism. Other discursive techniques, such as the trope of manifest destiny, which was used by white settler colonials to "cover up their tracks" (Veracini, 2011, p. 2), are also explained and analyzed. Creation stories, also land-based in nature, are powerful, and they play an influential role in guiding everyday practices for both Indigenous Peoples and white settler colonial people. As a result of colonization, not all Indigenous Peoples have had access to their traditional teachings since racist colonizing processes included denigration and elimination of traditional knowledges and ceremonies. For some Indigenous Peoples, attending to these teachings may be accompanied by feelings of shame and humiliation due to their experiences at residential schools, where traditional knowledge was actively disparaged. Similarly, not all white settler colonial people may be aware of their own traditions or accept them wholesale even if they are aware. However, creation stories have the power to engender normative practices, and it is these normative practices that are the focus of analysis in this article.

I begin with a description of three creation stories. The first is that of the Haudenosaunee people. The reason I chose this particular story is because the Haudenosaunee people live and tell the story of how Turtle Island (otherwise known as North America) came to be and, as I am a settler on Turtle Island, this story particularly resonated with me. I contrast this with Genesis 3, a Judeo-Christian creation story that has played a dominant role in the social imaginary in the west. Finally, I have created a narrative of the origins of the state (another kind of creation story) as constructed by Thomas Hobbes, whose writings play a central role in European Enlightenment thought and liberalism. I begin by remarking on the contrasting visions that each of these stories offers, and then I delineate the implications of these creation stories as they impact

everyday practices and understandings of social justice, after which I turn my attention to the implications of my analysis for informing processes of reconciliation. I end with some reflections on what Indigenous land (earth)-based teachings have to offer social work education, especially in response to the Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015).

A Word About Stories as Epistemology

"The truth about stories is that that's all we are," wrote Cherokee author and scholar Thomas King (2003, p. 2). The first part of this sentence is concerned with the relationship between truth and stories. The claim in Indigenous writings by scholars of various Nations is not that stories are the "truth," but rather that truths are expressed as narratives, as stories (Mika, 2015). The second part of the sentence alludes to the relationship between stories and the self. Unlike Freudian notions of psychoanalysis, the stories people tell about themselves are not viewed as projections that point to an essential, or repressed, self that gets revealed through an analysis of the narratives. Rather within Indigenous philosophies is a commonly held insight that there is no essential self outside of the stories we tell because there is no real "true" self that exists within a binary of self and narratives of self (Armstrong, 1998). Our true selves, like all truths, are storied in nature.

The narrative nature of truth reveals much about Indigenous understandings of truths. It tells us that truths (stories) are communal and grounded in specific cultures (Armstrong, 2006). It tells us that truth is multi-layered and shows itself differently based on the active participation and perspective of the truth-sayer (narrator) and of the listener (narratee), which changes over time. Unlike dominant western understandings of truths or the truth, truths as narratives provide perspective and are not prescriptive in nature. Truths articulated as stories have their own logic within their own worldview. This logic creates the conditions within which the story exists and does not rely on other kinds of truth-telling, such as those based on mechanical reasoning.

King (2003) illustrated this point when he set up a scenario where he is recounting a creation story that ends with Earth being grounded on the back of a turtle. In his scenario someone (a different person in each chapter of his book) asks the same question: "What is under the turtle?" The response is always the same: "Another turtle," and the person questioning understands that the story is using a different kind of logic, one that is more playful than that based on analytical reasoning. King recounted the shift in the understanding of the questioner in this oft-repeated scenario as they get the hang of this "game," learning to participate in it on its own terms (King, 2003; Mika, 2015).

Stories are wonderous things, said King (2003), but they are dangerous too because once they have been set loose on the world they cannot be taken back again. Stories can create mischief and do not have to be about relaying truth. Not all stories are the same. The relationship of stories to truth claims can only be assessed by the practices that they engender and the nature of the teachings that narratives offer.

Creation Stories

Land-based teachings, like all truth claims, have their basis in stories, particularly creation stories by which Indigenous Peoples live their lives (Mills, 2018). Land is a

shorthand in Indigenous teachings for all of earth, sky, water, air, and more. It is much more than a material piece of earth (Tuck et al., 2014; Wildcat et al., 2014). Indigenous scholars insist that land-based teachings are not simply abstract. They are guides to everyday practices, social relationships, and how to live one's life (Wildcat et al., 2014). The land itself and its particular contours, including the vista of the sky, the quality of air, its geography, etc., are the site of education. Paying attention to its specificities yields particular lessons that become part of the cultural and knowledge practices of specific communities. Indigenous land-based teachings are therefore place-based. As Meyer (2008) attested,

> Land is our mother. *This is not a metaphor*. For the Native Hawaiians speaking of knowledge, land was the central theme that drew forth all others. You came from a place. You grew in a place and you had a relationship with a place. *This is an epistemological idea.*… [emphasis in original] One does not simply learn about land, we learn best from land. (p. 219)

Therefore, the teachings of land-based education, including creation stories, are not generalizable nor are they meant to be universal.

The creation stories in liberal white settler colonial teachings take the place of a canon and are articulated as a universal set of truths (Cajete, 1994). Individual thinkers become formative and play a foundational role in liberal perspectives rather than existing within a dynamic relation to knowledge that requires continual re-interpretation, as the genre of story-telling demands (Mika, 2015). These creation stories too guide everyday practices, but they serve a dual function as truth claims and as a veneer to justify a set of practices, in this case the extractive violence of white settler colonialism.

In the next section, I describe three creation stories; one of the Haudenosaunee people, another from Christian people as expressed in Chapter 3 of Genesis and finally from the book, *Leviathan*, as penned by Hobbes, who is considered one of the fathers of liberal thought. All three were chosen because they represent ideas that are foundational to their particular perspectives and practices.

The Haudenosaunee Creation Story

From among many creation stories that exist within Indigenous cultures, I picked the Haudenosaunee creation story as it is about the creation of Turtle Island (North America). The following is a paraphrase of a part of the story as published by the Oneida Nation (n.d.). The Oneida People are made up of three clans, all of whom belong to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which is composed of six Nations.

The Haudenosaunee attribute their ability to retain a sense of unity, particularly in the face of so much adversity resulting from colonization, to the principles that they derived from their land-based teachings, including their creation story (Oneida Indian Nation, n.d.). Their remarkable ability to work in concert as one people within a confederacy-style government was something that the British colonials emulated when setting up their own Canadian federation (Tully, 1995).

> A long-time age the earth was deep beneath the water and only water animals lived in this world. Above the earth lived the Great Spirit in the Land

> of the Happy Spirits, at the center of which was a large apple tree whose roots extended deep into the ground. One day the Great Spirit pulled the tree from its roots. He called his daughter to look into the hole created by the uprooting of the tree. As she did so, she saw through the earth, which was covered in water and clouds. Her father, the Great Spirit, then urged her to go into the world she was looking at and tenderly picked her up, dropping her into the hole. She slowly began to float downwards.
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> The water animals, looked up in the sky and saw a great light descending: it was the daughter of the Great Spirit, whom they named Sky Woman. Watching her descend, the animals were afraid of her at first because of the light emanating from her. They dove deep into the water, but then they overcame their fear and came back up and began to worry about what would happen to Sky Woman when she reached the water.
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> The beaver was the first to attempt a rescue and told the others that they must find a dry place for her to rest upon. He plunged deep beneath the water in search of earth but was unsuccessful, and after a time his dead body surfaced to the top of the water. The loon then tried to find some earth but was also unsuccessful and so on with each animal, but all failed in their search to look for some dry earth. The muskrat was the last one to say he would try, and when his dead body floated to the top, he came up with his paws tightly fisted. When the others opened his claws, they found a little clump of earth. The animals then patted the earth on the back of the great turtle and the turtle grew and grew as did the amount of earth on his back. This earth became an island and is what came to be known as North America.
>
> Meanwhile, Sky Woman continued to come down, and as she neared a flock of swans flew upwards and brought her down resting on their back. They placed her down slowly upon the newly formed earth.

The portion of the creation story narrated above speaks to the interconnectedness of all things, which include humans, animals, and other animate and non-animate beings (Burrows, 2018; Starblanket & Stark, 2018). The earth on the back of the Turtle grows and expands, emphasizing its animate nature and its deep connection to the turtle, who also grows.

It is a story that speaks to the collaborative nature of the relationship between all beings (King, 2003). In this story the animals collaborate to ensure that Sky Woman lands safely from the sky, to the point where some of them sacrifice their lives in trying to ensure her safety. There is clearly a notion present in the story that speaks to how each being has gifts that they bear and that they offer to further the well-being of all. It is also interesting that the animals named in this story are those that survive both on land and in the sea, reinforcing the non-binary nature of land and water.

Sky Woman gives birth to the first man, thus establishing a matrilineal narrative of first creation (not included in the excerpt above) and the concomitant importance of nurturance and care as a first principle. This creation story, not unlike other Indigenous creation stories, emphasizes the importance of relationality and relationships. More broadly speaking, some Indigenous Peoples communicate the centrality of this principle,

across various Indigenous traditions, through the enunciation "All our relations," which is repeated at the end of each ceremony (Armstrong, 2001). I analyze the envisioning of social justice contained in this creation story later in the article.

A Christian Creation Story

Just as the creation story of the Haudenosaunee people plays a central role in informing their teleology, so too has the creation story found in Genesis 3 (*New Revised Standard Version,* 1989, Genesis 3:6–24) of the Christian bible influenced the philosophical worldview and life practices of white settler colonizers, directly for those who profess the Christian faith and indirectly because of the influence of Genesis on political philosophers like Hobbes. Similar to Indigenous land-based stories, there are other versions of creation stories, like the ones found in Genesis 1 (28–30) and Genesis 2 (5–25) that postulate different narratives of how the world was created but have played less of a dominant role in the Christian world.

Comparing these two creation stories reveals contrasting teachings about the relationship between the land and its people, other animals, and other beings. Adam and Eve (as the first people) are also the children of the Great Spirit called God; they too live in a place of happy spirits, in this case called Eden; and that is where the commonality ends. The Christian people's creation story goes on to describe how Eve gets tempted by a snake to take a bite of an apple, something expressly forbidden by the Great Spirit. The relationship between animals and humans, in this case that of a snake in relation to Adam and Eve, is one of conflict: unlike the muskrat and the other animals in the Haudenosaunee creation story, the snake is out to cause the downfall of the first people. Eve in turn tempts Adam to take a bite of the apple, initiating a gender war that lasts to this day. Their actions cause a rupture that is cosmic in nature when God, the Great Spirit, is enraged for being disobeyed and creates psychic consequences as human beings are forever condemned to live out their lives as sinful creatures (bearers of the original sin). Rather than being gently removed to Earth, they are thrown out of Eden to land on Earth.

In Genesis, the narrative of human beings' life on Earth begins after having left the garden of Eden, and it is made clear that their presence on this earth is a form of punishment, a dis-location. where they are kicked out of a perfect world to toil on Earth and "subdue" it by having dominion over all living things on Earth (*New Revised Standard Version,* 1989, Genesis 1:28–30). This then is a story of strife and of human beings establishing power over all other beings and over the land (Genesis 3:16–24).

The contrast between the Haudenosaunee and the Christian creation stories is startling in its envisioning of land-based relations among humans and animals as well as with the land itself. The creation story of the Haudenosaunee people is characterized by non-hierarchical relations between the land and those who live on it as well as among all beings. This lack of hierarchy is also present in the fact that movement from the spirit world to earth is not envisioned as a falling from a state of grace to disgrace.

An Enlightenment (Hobbesian) Creation Story

A founding narrative that has had an immense influence on modern-day practices of the nation-state, with particular reference to the white colonial settler state, can be found

in the writings of Thomas Hobbes, a 17th century English political philosopher. I have chosen a Hobbesian account of how society came to be organized within nation-states because it is emblematic of the stories (that create mischief) that colonizers created to rationalize and justify colonizing practices being initiated by the British Empire on Turtle Island at the time. In fact, Hobbes wrote *Leviathan,* in which he narrated his version of the creation story of nation-states, directly in response to European presence on Turtle Island (McCoy, 2014). There is therefore a subtext to the Hobbesian narrative whereby the reference point, both oblique and direct, is the Indigenous Peoples whose lands are being colonized in the name of equality, freedom, and purportedly for the sake of advancing civilization. Creation stories constructed by liberal Enlightenment thinkers narrating the origins of the modern state rely on the creation story as described in Genesis. As Hobbes was a storyteller who did not use narrative as a form in which to construct the rendition of his truth, it is hard to provide an account of the creation story of the birth of the nation-state in the form of a story. I have therefore taken the liberty of extracting an account of Hobbes' narratives of the state of nature and the origin of the state, as described in his book, *Leviathan* (1651/1968) and transforming his account into a story:

A long, long time ago, everyone lived in a state of nature in which there were no laws and no one was governed by any one universal rule. The natural world had its own laws, and the laws of nature were twofold in character; the first law addressed the concept of freedom: each creature had the liberty to use their own power to preserve their individual life without interference (p. 79). Hobbes' (1651/1968) description of humans in this scenario was quite dramatic and not too far from the Christian creation story of the toil that humans experience on Earth:

> And because the condition of man … is a condition of war of every one against every one, in which case every one is governed by his own reason, and there is nothing he can make use of that may not be a help unto him in preserving his life against his enemies; it followeth that in such a condition every man has a right to everything, even to one another's body. (p. 79)

From this narrative it follows that freedom consists of the freedom to preserve one's life at any cost. This is a far cry from the creation story of the Haudenosaunee people, who emphasize the relational nature of all creation and a relational notion of freedom that stresses the freedom of gift-giving as necessary to one's sense of freedom.

The second law Hobbes identified in *Leviathan* was the law of equality, by which each was equally engaged in (though not equally capable of) defending themselves (p. 80). Self-preservation in terms of both equality and freedom was the sole motivation in life. Within Indigenous traditions generally, equality is understood in terms of dignity—all of creation has dignity and purpose, each has their responsibilities, and within a gift-giving relational concept of equality all have something to offer that is important to the happiness of the whole (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Yet equality is not understood through a universal reference point and on the basis of sameness; rather, as can be seen in the Haudenosaunee creation story, creation is filled with diversity, which is crucial for its survival. By contrast, life in Hobbes' (1651/1968) state of nature is without any ethics or culture, and he described the life of men in nature as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short" (p. 78). Hobbes then proceeded, on the same page, to give the

example of the Indigenous people of North America as living such a "brutish" life. He always used the male noun to refer to humankind, and in describing Indigenous people as living a brutish life he was not only gendered in his narrative of life but racist. This sharply contrasts with the ethical and matrilineal vision encapsulated within the Haudenosaunee creation story.

Hobbes' story ended with the narrative of the birth of what he termed the *commonwealth,* the nation-state, whereby citizens voluntarily agree to form a commonwealth society, entering into a mutual agreement that they would elect a representative/s to whom they swear loyalty in exchange for protection. In other words, in exchange for giving up their freedom to pursue their own interests unabated, members of society (citizens) are guaranteed security by the state, which pledges to treat the welfare of all citizens with equal concern (equality). In his words,

> every citizen retains as much liberty as he needs to live well in peace, enough liberty is taken from others to remove the fear of them.… To sum up: outside the commonwealth is the empire of passions, war, fear, poverty, nastiness, solitude, barbarity, ignorance, savagery; within the commonwealth is the empire of reason, peace, security, wealth, splendour, society, good taste, the sciences and good will. (Hobbes, 1651/1968, pp. 115–116).

Hobbes' narrative of the birth of the nation-state sets up a series of binaries. Nation-states are understood as coming into existence in reaction to, and as an alternative to, life lived in nature. Society is formed when "men" get together and decide to act in ways that are antithetical to nature. *Civilization,* that is, the space of the commonwealth, and *nature*, which is an assumed space outside of civilization, are treated as strictly dichotomized spaces, the latter as savage and brutish and the former as rational and peaceful. Nature is therefore seen to exist in an antagonistic relationship to the social. Society is not rooted in and of the earth but rather over the earth through the use of a social contract, where the social stands in opposition to the natural. The colonial context, as well as Hobbesian references to Indigenous Peoples living on Turtle Island in *Leviathan,* make it evident that nature stood in for Indigenous Peoples (of colour) and their way of life, which was characterized as brutish, while society stood in for the Europeans (white), who were civilized and peaceable—and all at a time when the British were engaged in inflicting genocidal violence on Indigenous Peoples.

Moreover, there is a sense in this narrative that the essential nature of "men" is to be at war with each other and with other beings, either through competition or by use of arms. Peace can only occur through a loss of freedom. Being treated as equals by the state comes at the price of a curtailment to the freedoms that allow "men" to exercise their essential nature. Equality, the result of entering into a contractual relationship with the state, exists in a hierarchical relationship to freedom, which is viewed as primary to humans. Moreover, the rights of freedom and those of equality are set up as being at odds with each other: to be treated with equal concern one has to forfeit some of one's freedom, which sets up a binary between freedom and equality. Rather than being in relationship, this creation story propagates a vision of people as living autonomous and separate lives, each occupied in the pursuit of self-interest.

In this narrative the role of the state is mythologized as one of maintaining peace, security, and concern for the welfare of all citizens. In fact, in the case of Indigenous people in all white settler colonial societies, the state is a perpetrator of violence and has its basis in brute force, which it inflicts on marginalized (racialized) populations in the name of furthering civilization. The material reality of the role of colonial states as predators using colonized sites for resource extraction in order to accumulate wealth and power is completely absent from this narrative. However, dissecting the story of the origins of the state is important because it reveals the ideology and discourse within which state practices are conceived and couched. The founding narratives of the origins of the state contain a syllogism: they argue that the state is necessary to offer protection to people and then go on to argue that state practices are protective because that is what a state does.

Other discourses are put to use to maintain the artifice of the givenness of the state as always already there. The use of the trope of manifest destiny is a particularly insidious form by which the white settler colonial state's existence is rationalized. Manifest destiny as a discourse has been used to invoke a God-given right (destiny) of white colonial (Christian) settlers to expropriate the land on which different Indigenous nations live in order to cultivate it. This can more clearly be found in the writings of Locke, a contemporary of Hobbes who is also accredited the status of a founding father of liberalism. McCoy (2014) argued that "John Locke maintained that the material processes of 'clearing, planting, cultivation, or stocking with animals' made lands previously held in common into private property, which, he argued, was part of God's plan for dominion" (p. 6). Communal land was treated as a blank canvas, *terra nullius*, and, along with the narratives (theories) derived from liberal Enlightenment thinkers like Locke and Hobbes, aided the colonial project of erasing the land-based traces on which white settler colonialism is founded.

The creation stories that inform the liberal imaginary continue to exercise their power even today, as is evidenced by overdevelopment of resources in liberal western states and by neo-liberal leanings, whereby colonial nations continue to maintain power through transnational extraction of land and resources, making land a valuable commodity for global capitalist enterprise. Indigenous creation stories retain a marginalized space in white colonial societies everywhere though they have much to teach about environmental balance and the intangible value of land-based teachings.

Reconciliation and Land-Based Teachings

In 2012 an Indigenous-led organization, Reconciliation Canada, was established with a vision "to promote reconciliation by engaging Canadians in dialogue that revitalizes the relationships between Indigenous peoples and all Canadians" and by advancing the work of Calls to Action 43–44 recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC; Reconciliation Canada, 2021; TRC, 2015). This relational vision of how to live together within a multicultural context is in fact consistent with the relational way of life that characterizes most Indigenous communities, as has been discussed so far. Since then, there has been a lot of debate, undertaken by Elders and Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and activists on how exactly to define reconciliation.

My view of reconciliation is informed by the one promoted by the TRC, as stated above and by other Indigenous scholars such as Ladner (2018, p. 245), who defined reconciliation in the following way: "Simply put, it is an ecologically grounded ethical and political philosophy about how we live together in the best way possible or how we live best together." As an immigrant, racialized cis-gender woman who is also a scholar within the field of social work, I have both an insider/outsider relationship with the worldview of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment thought. I have been influenced by and have a strong critique of its understanding of the role of the nation-state in relation to its citizens as well as the atomistic and individualist vision of social relations assumed in Enlightenment thought. Engaging in processes of reconciliation, and taking my cue from Indigenous scholars and thinkers, has deepened my critique by requiring of me to consider both the worldview and the ecological context that guides our everyday practices. Therefore, reconciliation, if it is going to be real for me, has meant gaining an understanding of the land-based teachings and philosophies by which Indigenous Peoples envision a good life. At the same time, it has also meant delving deeper into the land-based claims that are often left obscure within western Enlightenment worldviews that yet guide conceptions of what constitutes a good life. In tracing the implications for everyday practices that these differing, land-based narratives have to offer as a part of my reconciliation process, I am able to learn to more clearly critique the implications of Enlightenment-based creation stories and to pay attention to the teachings offered by Indigenous ones. The relational view of reconciliation that I am adopting therefore means that I must reorient my own understanding of reconciliation by grounding it in land-based teachings and considering its implications for everyday practices, both professional and personal.

The lessons for reconciliation become clearer when contrasting the three creation stories described above in their understanding of human beings' relationship to land. The three narratives are based on opposing understandings of creation, land, earth, and the relationships that exist on Earth. In the case of white settler colonial people's creation stories, notions of social justice are tied to land ownership, or more generally to a capitalist economic system whereby the propertied classes have the greatest access to rights of freedom or autonomy to pursue their self-interest. Within Indigenous perspectives, whereby people belong to the land and not the other way around (Armstrong, 2001; Burrows, 2018), social justice for humans or others cannot be conceived *outside* of environmental justice (Ladner, 2018; Tully, 2018). The dichotomy that exists between nature and society in white settler colonialism is not present in most Indigenous creation stories (Burrows, 2018). Reconciliation therefore necessarily means paying attention to Indigenous earth-based teachings as a guide to practices of social justice.

White settler colonial perspectives on social justice are state-centric. Hobbes spoke to this idea when he posited the state as having the power to mete out justice by balancing the rights of freedom and equality for its citizens. Therefore, reconciliation efforts are circumscribed within a nationalist framework that is vertical in nature and that emphasizes the relationship of the nation-state with each individual or individual Nation. For the most part, in practice this has meant that much of reconciliation has occurred through treaty-making or negotiating practices, more often than not through courts of

law, while the rest of the population appears disengaged from processes of reconciliation (Asch, 2018; Starblanket & Stark, 2018). If reconciliation practices are to occur in ways that epistemologically and ontologically challenge normative understandings of politics, then a relational paradigm espoused by Indigenous Peoples would mean that the hearts and minds of people need to be engaged in this process across families, communities, and nations (Asch, 2018; Starblanket & Stark, 2018).

The necessity of considering other processes of reconciliation may be obvious given the nature of state violence perpetrated on Indigenous Peoples both historically and contemporaneously (Carrière & Thomas, 2014), but in fact this view radically challenges normative white settler colonialist thinking. The legacy of colonialism has been to construct space in particular ways—as bounded nation-states that live as separate and autonomous (sovereign) entities in relation with other states (Moosa-Mitha, 2017). This construction of space into singular states is therefore a given in settler societies, and taking land-based Indigenous teachings as a starting point of reconciliation processes requires suspending the givenness of this particular construction of space by allowing for multi-nation presences within one state boundary as well as by dethroning the state as the final arbiter of social justice. This can be seen happening when restorative-justice models of mediation are used by courts of law or when Indigenous communities take over the running of child-welfare agencies in their Nations within Canada.

The hierarchical nature of rights as well as relationships within white colonial, liberal societies, where the rights of freedom in its individualist sense are considered more central than the rights of equality, are also problematic to processes of reconciliation. This results in a situation where concern, care, and nurturance, all of which constitute aspects of equality, are only possible by compromising people's rights of freedom to pursue their own self-interest and to be viewed as agentive beings. This inbuilt contradiction between equality and freedom within liberal theory, which is present even as early as in Hobbes' articulation of the two laws of nature and of the origins of the state, has had a severe and significant impact on all people requiring state care. It has meant that those in receipt of state care are stereotypically viewed as dependants of the state, unable to provide for their own care.

In the case of Indigenous Peoples, white colonial legislation through the Indian Act (1985) imposed on Indigenous Peoples the status of "wards of the state." (Carrière & Thomson, 2014). Thus, the colonial state empowered itself by taking on the role of a parent who knew what was in the best interests of their wards better than Indigenous Peoples themselves. Taking away the freedom of Indigenous Peoples to continue with their ways of life using the excuse of providing care, and making care conditional on compromising their freedom, therefore has deep roots in the very stories that colonial settlers narrated in their creation stories in relation to their construction of nature, society, and the state.

The entire residential-school era, during which Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their homes and put into residential schools, as well as the continuing saga of state interference in the lives of Indigenous communities through overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child-protection system, are cases in point. Using the cloak of "concern" for the "best interest of the child" (a principle sanctified in law to allow for state intervention), white settler colonial states such as the ones on Turtle Island and

Australia treated Indigenous Peoples as incapable of freely bringing up their children in a manner congruent with their way of life. State care therefore results in another form of state governance.

The universal and prescriptive tone of liberal creation stories and the hierarchical nature of social justice results in the treatment of equality that is based on sameness. Those who come closest to the normative standard of individualist, self-interested, and autonomous citizen are considered to be most eligible to be free to pursue their own way of life. The normative citizen is therefore assumed to be male (free to participate in the market while being supported by a spouse at home), white (engaging in a capitalist system that is part of the white settler colonial economy) and a breadwinner (not dependent on state care). Indigenous Peoples, who consider relationships as central to their way of being, who engage in an alternative economic system that is non-consumerist, and who are part of reciprocal gift-giving cultures that emphasize horizontal rather than vertical care relationships, are viewed as incapable of being equally free. This assimilative policy could only be understood as socially just practice within a narrative that makes care (equality) conditional on curbing people's right to pursue their ways of life (freedom).

As Tully (2018) suggested, Indigenous earth-based teachings advocate the importance of reciprocity of gift-giving as guiding practice. Reconciliation then needs to have its basis in a non-hierarchical notion of practice that understands freedom as relational (Starblanket & Stark, 2018) and in terms of an equality that is substantive in nature. This frees all members to live in a society in which relationships with each other, via the state or otherwise, are treated as given and in ways that do not construct the subjectivity of people in receipt of care as either victims (unable to look after themselves), or criminals (deliberately not wishing to look after themselves). It also offers the possibility of care that does not reinsert sameness as the basis of state care by challenging a universal reference point (read white, male, able-bodied, salaried, cis-gendered, secular, heterosexual, etc.) as a standard by which all are judged.

Land-based teachings are place-based (Armstrong, 1998): they emanate from the cultures and teachings of a specific people and within a specific community and geography, as I discussed earlier. White settler colonialism is a process that not only treats that specific place as a blank but also imposes a linear understanding of time onto place (Starblanket & Stark, 2018). Both social justice and time are understood in linear terms, and place is conflated with time: Indigenous ways of life that were place-based are seen as existing within a distant past that is "pre-contact" along the lines of Hobbes' narrative of the origins of the state. Modernity (time) becomes coeval with civilization (place) within a white settler colonial narrative that views settlement as the beginning point of civilization.

Within such a narrative, the only way to recoup traditional teachings is by going back to some pristine place/time before white settler colonialism (Burrows, 2018). In fact, place, like identity and time, is not stagnant, with specific places both reflecting many periods of history at the same time and changing through time (Massey, 2005). Indigenous people have a cyclical understanding of time (Mills, 2018), not a linear one with its attendant preoccupation with progress. In terms of reconciliation, the lesson is

that reconciliation must occur repeatedly through time and not as a one-off event; it is to be repeated and attended to continually in the way that the seasonal cycles are repeated (Burrows, 2018).

Implications of Reconciliation Practices for Social Justice–Oriented Social Work Education

I now turn my attention to discussing how social work education can pick up on the lessons that Indigenous, land-based education has to offer**.** Social work education, if it is to be a part of the reconciliation project, should become conscious of and acknowledge the potency of creation stories in acting as a guide to everyday practices in the personal and professional lives of social workers. It is important to teach students to examine the creation stories that inform their own collectives—whether those of a collective of people living in poverty or one based on ethnicity, faith-based creation stories, or creation stories that serve to provide a vision for trans collectives, or indeed the multi and intersectional creation stories that provide a horizon to the activities of our daily practices. As King (2003) has reminded us, stories are all we are. Unlearning the "truths" of certain stories and the harms they have caused should be an important aspect of education for social justice. This is a gap that exists in the writings of many critical theorists, and I believe that by paying attention to Indigenous land-based teachings people are first of all reminded that their daily practices have deep roots in the stories they tell about their place in creation and with each other.

Indigenous land-based teachings, as discussed earlier, teach people to consider relationships in all their varieties as central to the process of reconciliation and to society. Social relationships are a core concept in social work education. Considering and dissecting how equality and freedom came to be understood in individualist ways that are contrary to forming social relationships, due to Enlightenment-based thinking that students may not even be aware of, is necessary for social justice education. Gaining an understanding of relationality, responsibility, and equity through an analysis of various creation stories that have played a role in people's lives more generally, and specifically learning to reorient notions of the key concepts that inform understanding of relationship based on Indigenous land-based teachings, will result in an education that is as much about reconciliation as it is about social justice.

Examining the three creation stories over the course of this article has made me aware of the importance of centring decolonizing education within social justice–oriented social work education. It is important to uncover and unlearn the assumptions engendered by colonizing narratives that seek to make "mischief" by mystifying and rationalizing colonial practices through their particular creation stories. Students should be provided with an opportunity to examine how this has occurred in multiple and intersecting narratives that form the background to their own beliefs and assumptions about processes of colonization. This type of education should also lead to an activist stance where students seek to engage in practices of reconciliation, which are not separate from practices of decolonization. Moreover, reconciliation processes do not occur only in a vertical way with students preoccupied solely by the actions of the welfare state towards Indigenous Peoples, usually in the context of the classroom. Students should engage their own hearts and minds in reaching out to communities, raising awareness, and building relationships across many people and multiple Nations.

Social work education that engages in reconciliation practices should also include a critique of normative, liberal notions of social justice. Hierarchical conceptualizations of social justice, according to which equality is secondary to both self-autonomy and practices of social care that are assimilative in nature, must be challenged. Rather, using land-based teachings, students should centre relational notions of autonomy and equality that emphasize equity, the basis of which lies in the recognition of the diversity of gifts that each has to offer and the responsibilities of each for all to flourish, as is evident in the creation story of the Haudenosaunee people.

Time and space, as I have outlined in my analysis earlier in this article, have also played a central role in processes of colonization. If social work education is to participate in reconciliation, students should be taught to analyze how notions of time and space deeply inform and perpetuate colonizing attitudes in everyday social work practices. For example, normative notions of time as linear and progressive, which are integral to Enlightenment-based creation stories, engender a racist view of progress that treats clients from white settler backgrounds as "civilized" and "others" as lacking. Colonial ways of life become the reference point by which all other communities are judged and inform social work interventions. Moreover, such an assumption of time is also translated into social worker–client relationships that envisage the helping relationship as beginning at the point of assessment and "progress" to termination as indicative of a successful outcome of that relationship. Clients who do not purposively move from one step to the next or who return for further support are viewed as "stuck," "overly dependent," or something similarly pejorative. An Indigenous land-based view of time as cyclical is a reminder that the beginning point of a client-–social worker relationship is not at the first point of encounter and that it is natural for a client to cycle in and out of the caring relationship as and when the need arises. Such revisioning can radically change how the social worker views their own role and the manner in which they construct client subjectivity.

Tuck et al. (2014) have called into question educational practices that justify settler occupation of stolen lands. This in fact speaks to the point that I made earlier in this article when I suggested that reconciliation efforts toward social justice cannot be envisaged outside of environmental justice. Colonial settler states' relationships with the land are based on predatory behaviours, as I have discussed earlier, which are tied to adherence to capitalist economics, which causes grave environmental injustices. This is also reflected in practices of social work, which as an arm of the state is part of a liberal capitalist nation-building project, reflected in the fact that those who come closest to the propertied, breadwinner citizen usually enjoy the greatest level of social rights (Brodie, 2008). Pensions, unemployment insurance (now euphemistically called employment insurance) and other social-welfare rights are tied to the level at which a person has participated in the formal labour economy. This capitalist, neo-liberal understanding of social care results in the marginalization of Indigenous social rights in fundamental ways as it relies on, while mystifying, the taken-for-granted understanding of land as property. Demystifying that relationship to students through the use of creation stories as I have done in this article can be a useful tool for decolonizing social work education.

An important aspect of social work education is teaching students the various legal acts that bind and guide social work practices. Canadian law, like other colonial and

settler colonial societies, is nationalist and eurocentric in character. Decolonizing social work education should include an understanding of how Canadian law was informed by and created in conjunction with Indigenous laws, like the laws that govern the Haudenosaunee people (Burrows, 2018; Tully, 1995). Rather than viewing the legislation within which social workers practise as existing in opposition to Indigenous, earth-based–informed laws, social work students should learn about the origins of Canadian law and the ways by which it was informed by the presence of the First Peoples of Turtle Island. This understanding will teach students of the transnational character of Canadian social-welfare law, allowing for an expansion in their ability to recognize and acknowledge Indigenous legal values and norms when they inform social work practices.

As discussed earlier, liberal, Enlightenment notions of social justice are hierarchical in nature, with the right of autonomy (independence) preceding that of equality. This hierarchy is reflected in social work through social worker–client relationships. Studies on how client subjectivity is constructed and impacted as a result of this relationship have shown the unequal power relationship that social workers hold: the client is constructed as less than, on the basis of their assumed dependence on social services, through various governmentality techniques (Pollack, 2008). Indigenous land-based teachings offer a liberating vision of understanding social relations as reciprocal gift-giving relationships. This understanding exists in Indigenous creation stories that speak to every being's, both animate and non-animate, ability to offer and receive gifts. The students can be taught to think about the nature of reciprocity that occurs in their everyday relationships with their clients and to learn to identify the pressures that exist within the system in which they work that disallow them from enjoying reciprocal relationships with their clients (Baskin, 2016).

Conclusion

The focus of this article has been to reconsider decolonizing social work education praxis through an analysis of Indigenous and non-Indigenous creation stories and the lessons that these stories offer in terms of their implications for reconciliation. *Reconciliation*, as I have discussed, is a contested term. I have understood it as a meeting point between various land-based narratives that allow for all beings to live a "good" life. This entails understanding the implications of land-based teachings as they exist in the traditions of the Haudenosaunee and those of Enlightenment-based thinkers. In doing so, I have looked at the mischief that narratives used to support colonization create as well as the wisdom contained in land-based teachings.

By paying attention to the creation stories of Enlightenment-based thinkers and those of Indigenous Peoples as commonly situated within land-based teachings, I have refuted the normative binary that views Indigenous teleologies as land-based and those within the Enlightenment tradition as not. I have tried to show how deeply entrenched land-based white colonial practices are through an analysis of creation stories that play a significant role in guiding practices of colonialism. Starblanket and Stark (2018) stated that it is not only what counts as Indigenous knowledge that matters but also how Indigenous knowledge is represented. According to these authors, Indigenous knowledge is often represented in the form of a critique of normative western knowledge claims. It is

used to address the gaps in these knowledge claims, which does nothing to challenge the normativity of these ways of knowing.

Over the course of this article, I have attempted to be self-conscious in how I represent Indigenous knowledge as a way of knowing in its own right and not only as a challenge to normative epistemological claims. As part of my own responsibility and engagement with reconciliation, I feel that it is important to not simply present Indigenous land-based creation stories but to do so by examining the very real and material implications they hold for my everyday practices as a social work educator. I have identified four lessons that Indigenous land-based teachings offer decolonizing social work education: social justice–oriented social work education (a) should be inclusive of environmental justice in how it contextualizes itself; (b) must include a relational and "horizontal" view of social justice that is multi-nation in nature rather than focusing solely on the vertical relationship between the state and its citizens; (c) should acknowledge the centrality of reciprocal relationality as an important concept for social workers rather than a "charity" view of social work that emphasizes the role of the social worker as a giver and that of the client as a receiver; and (d) should radically shift understanding of time as cyclical rather than as unilinear and progressive.

I want to end where I started, by sharing an insight that King (2003) offered about the nature of stories: "To every action there is a story.… don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if you had heard this story. You have heard it now" (p. 29).

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