CANADIAN SOCIAL WORK AT THE INTERSECTION OF FEMINISM, ECOLOGY
AND CULTURAL ANTI-OppRESSION: MAKING HOPE INTO GIANT RIVERS
FLOWING

by

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Canada
Approval Page
Abstract

This thesis is a textual research collage of two methodological approaches: a blend of discourse/documentary analysis and autoethnography (i.e., poetry, personal experience narratives) in combination with intersectional analysis. My objective was to explore (post)modern Canadian social work at the juncture of feminism, ecology and socio-cultural anti-oppression within notions of strategic meaning-building as a conceptualizing ethical journey whereby we as social work practitioners (researchers, theorists, analysts, ethicists and others) as well as clients may find ourselves critically re/framing our ways of knowing and experiencing.

My discussion discursively explores the potential of Canadian social work as ethically and spiritually-oriented praxis. The thesis is an exploratory, open-ended inquiry intended to further discussions regarding issues of ecological, gender and cross-cultural justice within the context of globalization. My hope is to participate in Canadian social work’s inquiry into decolonizing, transformative social change toward the anti-oppressive, respectful, life-affirming global interdependence of all relations.

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1I have used the term 'praxis' throughout the text to embrace the totality of social work endeavours including the precarious realm that is the (self)critical and often changing interface between social workers' ontological and epistemological assumptions (i.e. worldviews, theories, ethics etc.) and their practical application, meaning how we do ethical practice.
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Glossary

Anti-oppressive social work

Within the thesis context, the most useful definition of anti-oppressive practice is one by Dalrymple and Burke, (2006): “Anti-oppressive practice is a radical social work approach which is informed by humanistic and social work justice values and takes account of the experiences and views of oppressed people. It is based on an understanding of how the concepts of power, oppression and inequality determine personal and structural relations. Practitioners are required to analyze how the socially constructed divisions of race, age, gender, class, sexuality and disability and the impact of differential access to resources, interconnect and interact to define the life experiences of individuals and communities. From this position, practitioners are provided with the means to recognize and challenge situations of oppression within their work. Anti-oppressive practice is based on a belief that social work should make a difference, so that those who have been oppressed may regain control of their lives and re-establish their right to be full and active members of society. To achieve this aim, practitioners have to be political, reflective, reflexive and committed to promoting change” (p. 48).

Furthermore, I refer to Fook’s notion (cited in Dalrymple & Burke, 2006, pp. 48-49) of integrating anti-oppressive practice into (post)modern critical social work: “A postmodern and critical social work practice is primarily concerned with practicing in ways which further a society without domination, exploitation and oppression. It will focus both on how structures dominate, but also on how people construct and are constructed by changing social structures and relations, recognizing that there may be multiple and diverse constructions of ostensibly similar situations. Such an understanding of social relations and structures can be used to disrupt dominant understandings and structures, and as a basis for changing these so that they are more inclusive of different interest groups.”

Fook’s notion of (post)modern critical social work practice seems to me to combine the recognition of oppressions with their analysis and the strategies to transform oppressions into sites of inclusions. Throughout the thesis, my use of the term ‘social work’ reflects the definitions presented here of anti-oppressive and critical (post)modern social work. At the same time, I emphasize the anti-oppressive and (post)modern properties depending on the context.

Bias

I refer to Warren’s (2000) definitions of bias as a) empirical bias, or bias regarding faulty or false generalizations that fail to take into account relevant differences or generalizations which generate claims that are false (for example that women are genetically inferior or incapable of abstract reasoning), and b) contextual bias – bias in which all observations are biased because they are never context-free; this applies to all conceptual frameworks and theories.

I think that this differentiated understanding of bias is particularly meaningful in (anti-oppressive) social work praxis since it applies in different forms at all times.

Client

There is no standardized term for people who access social services. Although I am reluctant to do so, for the purpose of this project I am employing the term “client”. For further reference, Leadbetter (2002) delineates some aspects of this debate, saying that the diversity in terms is healthy and at the same time “it is also a sign of uncertainty and confusion in professional literature. Several of these terms are questioned by people – ‘customer’ conjures up
the image of a purchaser of a predesigned service in contrast with the notion of care planning in consultation with people, 'user' has connotations with drug or alcohol abuse, 'client' is reminiscent of traditional power relationships between professional therapists and people. No single term exists to describe the person receiving services which satisfies all requirements, from the perspectives or agencies, professionals and the public" (p 202)

**Colonialism and postcolonialism**

Colonialism refers to the forced influence and domination of one culture over another/others, it is primarily used in the context of cultural hegemony through western/eurocentric cultural dominance of cultures around the world during the past 500 years, it is used interchangeably with 'imperialism' to indicate political, militaristic and economic measures taken to achieve and reinforce dominance (T Smith, 2001).

Postcolonialism refers to the notion that as a global network of cultures we have moved past the era of colonization. Again, this is a eurocentric notion and emancipatory, difference-centered, cross-cultural and Indigenous theories have pointed to the fallacy of this idea. The interrelatedness between colonialism and postcolonialism is central to this paper. I have parenthesized the 'post' in (post)colonialism to reflect its contested and contradictory status in the context of anti-oppressive social work and draw attention to the ambiguous meaning of the 'post' prefix.

**Embodied knowledges**

Embodied knowing speaks to a knowing and being that is context-specific and acquired through lived experience. The concept of embodiment legitimizes this knowledge. I refer to Warren's (2000) notion of situated universals and the position in feminist standpoint theories that the concrete, daily lives of women must be considered legitimate subjective and intersubjective frames for analysis. The concept of embodied knowing is particularly important in anti-oppressive social work and in the context of (post)colonial social work ethics.

For the purpose of this thesis I speak of embodied knowledge or embodied experience from a feminist perspective and as a cross-cultural, Indigenous ally, to stress the need that the category of 'body' must be retained within the construction of language itself (Tomm, 1995). This is a (post)modernist decolonizing strategy that a) foregrounds the knowledges of oppressed women based on their bodily, embodied experiences, and b) advances the idea that we need to change phallocentric language to better accommodate women's experiences. As Tomm suggests, "[T]o emphasize women's bodies in language is not to fall back into a depressing biological determinism. Rather, it is to celebrate the reality of women as embodied knowers" (p 125).

**Ethics**

Ethics are often used interchangeably with values and morals. In the social work context, ethics remains a challenging concept since, unlike most professions, the scope of social work is framed by ethical considerations.

For the purpose of this paper, I refer to ethics as a concrete set of principles defined by the 2005 CASW Code of Ethics. At the same time I refer to Warren (2000) who cautions that ethics is not about what is rationally and morally permitted or required for any and all human beings in all contexts in accordance with some abstract principles (categorical universality), but

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2 I use first name initials to differentiate between Dorothy Smith and Lihiwai Smith
that ethics is and should be about what imperfect human beings living in particular historical, socio-economic contexts can and should do, given those contexts.

Warren’s definition speaks to the eurocentric assumptions of thinking in terms of universal ethics and their applicability/imposition across cultures and people’s context-specific, lived experiences. She advocates the idea of situated universalism where values of justice, duty, utility, or rights are still important in many moral contexts and deserve a key place in moral deliberations. However, the principles these values find expression in are understood as situated universals – principles that must be considered relevant to understanding and resolving ethical situations and conflicts.

**Eurocentrism**

I refer to eurocentrism and ‘eurocentric’ as a set of interlocked ideologies and ontological, epistemological paradigms which had their origins in European imperialism/colonization and whose worldviews characterize current (post)colonial globalization practices by dominant societies in Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia, parts of Asia, and Central and South America. Throughout the thesis, unless part of citations, ‘European’ and ‘eurocentric’ is written with lower capital ‘e’ to denote the homogeneous characteristics of these nations’ imperialist/colonizing strategies.

**Holism**

Like ‘ethics’ and ‘social work’ holism is a challenging concept to define because it is being used across a broad range of contexts; I base my understanding of ‘holism’ and ‘holistic’ on readings by Mellor (1997), Payne (2005), and Warren (2000) and the “Aboriginal Women’s Health Research Synthesis Project” by Stout, Kipling, and Stout (2001).

The notion of ‘holistic’ I prefer is in the sense of working toward being ‘whole’ emotionally, physically, mentally, spiritually. Holistic strategies and concepts support the goal toward holism and take into account our entire person, our specific situation as it is contextualized within our social reality. Holistic values are values which promote emotional, spiritual, physical and mental healing through interconnecting processes. According to Coates (2004) this recognition and cultivation of holistic values in ourselves supports the development of personal and hopefully social responsibility.

**Meaning-building**

I refer to meaning-building in the sense of ‘making meanings’ that support life-affirming, life-sustaining, critically hopeful notions of honouring ourselves, each other and the intrinsic value of all life forms, all relations and the planet we inhabit. I refer to Coholic (2002) who writes that “[M]aking meaning processes is described by Hartman (1996) as one aspect of human existence and the sense of purpose of meaning in everyday life that makes life liveable. Alternatively, meaninglessness conjures up feelings of hopelessness, isolation and in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts. The practice of helping clients to make meaning is described as a spiritual one because spirituality itself is conceptualized as a process of making meaning” (p. 7).

**Mindfulness**

Mindfulness captures, to my thinking, a state of being and doing that reflects a deep awareness regarding the notions defined under meaning-building: life-affirming, life-sustaining, celebratory notions of honouring our selves, each other and all beings, including the planet we
inhabit. To be mindful is to live out this materially interdependent awareness in its many different experiences.

**Modernism and postmodernism**

The idea that social work praxis inhabits both modernist and postmodernist notions of how we live in the world is central to the thesis. I refer to Payne (2005) and his interpretation of modernism as a product of European Enlightenment ideas which advocated objective knowledge as opposed to knowledge that is subjective or intersubjective, and the belief in one reliable, consistent, quantifiable rationale for humanity.

Postmodernism posits the idea of alternative ways of thinking about experience, knowledge and understanding of the world around us. It also suggests “that we cannot take for granted any social knowledge” because it is socially constructed and the social relations of this construction process are never neutral. In addition to Payne’s definition, I emphasize (post)modernism’s focus on language and discourse as a medium to position knowledge strategically. Please see the third chapter for further discussion. I have parenthesized the ‘post’ in (post)modern throughout the paper because I argue that social work inhabits both modernist and (post)modernist paradigms, and also because I want to draw attention to the ambiguity of the ‘post’ in (post)modernism as suggesting that we have evolved into a time that is no longer steeped in modernist assumptions/rationale.

**Social work**

The notion of social work is slippery because it can be applied across a broad range of tasks and professions. For the basic definition of social work I refer to the 2005 CASW Code of Ethics’ preamble: “The social work profession is dedicated to the welfare and self-realization of all people; the development and disciplined use of scientific and professional knowledge; the development of resources and skills to meet individual, group, national and international changing needs and aspirations; and the achievement of social justice for all. The profession has a particular interest in the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and/or living in poverty. Social workers are committed to human rights as enshrined in Canadian law, as well as in international conventions on human rights created or supported by the United Nations. As professionals in a country that upholds respect for diversity, and in keeping with democratic rights and freedoms, social workers respect the distinct systems of beliefs and lifestyles of individuals, families, groups, communities and nations without prejudice (United Nations Centre for Human Rights, 1992). Specifically, social workers do not tolerate discrimination based on age, abilities, ethnic background, gender, language, marital status, national ancestry, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation or socio-economic status” (p. 3).

Because of the breadth and variability of social work, Payne’s (2005) definition regarding social work is useful: “social work is part of a network of occupations working in a territory or social space concerned with interpersonal and social action. These occupations, such as counselling, nursing, development work, teaching, police work and medicine, have social roles, theories, social, legal and political contexts for their practice, systems of professional organization and education which may overlap but which also have distinct features. Professionals may move

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3 My definition is based on related concepts of ecofeminist ethics (Warren, 2000), bodied mindfulness (Tomm, 1997), and secular-sacred ethics (Somerville, 2006); I have not come across specific literature that precisely reflects my definition of mindfulness.
among these occupations, or stay within the boundaries of one throughout their careers. The boundaries between these groups are more or less permeable, more or less negotiable and shift according to social expectations and preferences as they are constructed within societies” (p. 27).

My use of the term ‘social work’ is context-specific: sometimes it refers specifically to the profession of social work and its academic counterparts of social work education, at other times it implies the practice as defined by the 2005 CASW Code of Ethics and implemented through social workers specific to that context in a variety of various professional fields.

Spirituality and spiritual practices
The notion of spirituality is rather open and fluid. In the context of this paper, spirituality foregrounds spiritually-based, oriented holistic values (Canda, 2006; Coates, 2004). My definition of spirituality is shifting as my consciousness changes. At this time I define spirituality as: a belief in honouring who we are as individual persons and as collectives; a belief/desire in the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life forms; an appreciation, reverence and deep respect for the diversity of all life and a conviction that we learn from one another; a belief in the need to live in egalitarian harmony with/in our social and natural environment; a belief in transcendence and that there may be a greater power beyond human understanding of life on earth.

At the conceptual level, spirituality is in itself a search toward deeper understanding of our human identity, as well as search toward purpose and greater fulfillment. Spirituality is usually defined as being more private, intimate as well as more overarching than religion. Spiritual practices are ways of living and being that embrace these values/beliefs. I understand spiritualities as being different from religions in that spiritualities are less institutionalized, and less historically fixed through secular manifestations and their conjoined political roles/functions (Canda, 2002). Spiritual contemplation therefore lends itself to becoming a potentially empowering anti-oppressive agent.
Acknowledgement

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Professor Dawn Hemingway for lending her time and expertise, for sharing her critically passionate advocacy of social, gender and eco justice and insisting that this project was worthwhile. I also want to acknowledge the generous, insightful support of thesis committee members Dr. Indrani Margolin and Dr. Henry Harder. I thank the people who made UNBC and the School of Social Work into a critically inquiring and creatively healing space. Finally, I want to acknowledge this~our planet earth and its relations for nourishing, rooting and containing all that I am.

Dedication

I dedicate this paper to Indigenous women everywhere for insisting on the truth that we are all embodied, interconnected, interdependent beings who want to re/conceive respectful relationships with/in this planet, with each other and with all relations.

It is a matter of survival.
Introduction
Personal positioning and motivational rationale

Until recently, I would have argued that we must start organizing with social, economic or political questions: getting large groups of people together. I no longer believe that is how to do it. To free ourselves from the systems that hold power, we have to start to build a culture of hope. And that begins in our own lives and the lives of our neighbours and friends. It’s like gardening: if you want strong, beautiful and healthy plants, you have to build up the soil. (Kuyek, 1990, p. 66)

Inserting my self into the text and thus identifying my personal location/voice seems one of the more challenging and hopeful tasks of writing. I am reminded of Smith’s (1993) assertion that while there may be an actual subject before the textually constructed and mediated one, at the same time “actual practices constitutive of the formality of formal organization are not idiosyncratic but are embedded in and articulated with those of the extended social relations of the ruling apparatus” (p. 219). Yet the significance of articulating one’s position at the outset of one’s writing cannot be underestimated if we want to contribute meaningfully to the dismantling of systemic oppression (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006). I am a middle class Caucasian single female parent of two pre-teen sons living well below the Canadian Low Income Cut-off. I am a first generation immigrant, and experiencing myself as a postmodern european ‘settler/consumer’ has opened my thinking and consciousness toward issues of human rights as well as (post)colonial social, gender and cross-cultural discourses of oppression, both within Canada and globally. The themes that have sustained/challenged me throughout my adult life are a commitment to the environment within an ecofeminist paradigm and a commitment to gender equality as well as to social and gender justice from a holistic, planetary perspective. Questions at the heart of my private and professional life continue to be: who benefits? How do we move from an insight into the need for social change into motivation and passionate engagement? How do we raise children so they will embrace life-affirming, holistic values of interdependence and
social/ecological connectedness in a North-American global society that is largely misogynist/oppressive, fear-based and short-term comfort/profit driven? This has prompted my interest in social policy/analysis, and the world of ethics as it encompasses what we do, how we think/act, and why - and yet these ethics rarely enter conversation in our lives in a more articulated way beyond the ‘tap dance’ of surface talk.

Since we are, invariably, the agents, interpreters, executors and survivors of our own and each others’ ethics, theories, policies and practices, I will sketch my standpoint of ethical accountability within the context of my life, its personal and professional experiences and current social work training (Bishop, 1994; Kuyek, 1990; Smith, 1990, 2004). I do this in order to gain and choose deeper insight into what has prompted me to be where I am at this moment. Throughout the past twenty years my personal ideological paradigm has been informed by a range of experiences in the social work context whose insider/outsider and mediating experiences have continued to shape my growing awareness of the strategic embeddedness of politics of oppression within/beyond the diverse microspheres of people’s lives. The motivating thrust behind the topic for this thesis lies in the insightful if often kaleidoscopic combination of my personal experiences and insights. Throughout the years, each of these experiences seemed independent from the next, yet, looking back they highlight for me aspects of social work practice that are not explicitly articulated in the Code of Ethics nor (yet) taught in many social work curricula. After years of working in different capacities within the arena of social work, I have observed that many of the desires/needs clients experience (some of) which have been encapsulated as social work ethical principles often seem to lie within the holistic/spiritual domain. These include clients’ search for deeper meaning in life beyond functional existence and

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4 I am referring here primarily - but not exclusively - to the 2005 CASW principles (Code of Ethics and Guidelines for ethical practice)
practitioners’ interest in mindful, holistic praxis to cultivate internal as well as external
connectedness and interdependence.

The following thoughts provide further rationale for the proposed thesis topic: Canada’s
evolving multicultural, multi-ethnic mosaic requires social work praxis to be continuously fluid
and open to the needs of its clients and practitioners. Allowing for a consciousness and language
comfortable with expressing its multifaceted qualities seem like core requirements for mindful
practice. Given the hesitancy regarding considerations of holistic praxis and spirituality in
Canadian social work ethics, theory, practice and research, I knew that I wanted to deconstruct
my own cultural conditioning surrounding spirituality and its possibilities within social work. As
well, I knew that I needed to redefine my understanding of the very praxis of social work at its
broadest conceptual level in terms that would make considerations of holistic and spiritual
practices a more integral part of social work praxis in my own life.

At the macro level of social work discourse and praxis, five broadly interconnected,
overlapping and mutually reinforcing orientations of inquiry seem to work toward sustainable,
long-term local-to-global solutions, thus providing a foundation for social work practice in
Canada and elsewhere in the world. They are: anti-oppressive perspective, culturally specific
inclusivity perspective, feminist postmodern/poststructural perspective, ecofeminist/deep
ecological perspective, and spiritually-oriented mindfulness perspective. At the same time, there
is a growing consciousness in Canadian and other Western societies regarding the linkages
between the ecological destruction and social injustices, between patriarchal governance,
women’s oppression and poverty as well as between patriarchy, corporatization/globalization,
cultural oppression and environmental degradation. Finally, our deeper search for the cultivation
of spiritual considerations and mindful practice throughout our lived experience, including the
terrain of social work ethics, theories, practice and research, may offer un/expected, deeply needed insights into long-term sustainable solutions to the human and ecological crisis we face.
Chapter One: Tools of inquiry

The following three sub-sections contextualize my research question within ethical considerations and thesis limitations as well as within the methodology and methodological tools. The discussion of opening ourselves to alternative methodologies/methodological tools as pathways – and data – toward re/conceptualizing and producing knowledges are central considerations in the thesis.

Articulation of research question, thesis limitations and ethical considerations

My goal has been to formulate a research question that connects to my personal paradigm at the same time as it challenges the paradigm’s comfort zones, one that I can consider thought-provoking and solution-oriented in the context of critical Canadian social work praxis as well as one that contextualizes the planetary challenges of (post)colonialism and globalization. The central research question for this thesis is the following: How does Canadian social work discourse at the intersection of feminism, ecology and socio-cultural anti-oppression inform embodied meaning-building toward a cross-culturally appropriate global tomorrow?

This question is embedded within a cluster of questions that lay the thesis thematic foundation and guide its objective:

1. What, if any, relevance do concepts like ecology, feminism, socio-cultural anti-oppression have in postmodern Canadian social work, and in the broader context of global ethics?

2. How relevant is Canada’s legacy (historical and ongoing) of Aboriginal assimilation politics for the development of Canadian social work discourse/praxis in the context of anti-oppression and spirituality?
3. How does Canadian social work relate to visions of a global tomorrow, and/or global ethics?

4. Is there a need for Canadian social work to reframe itself within the context of globalization?

5. What theoretical and ethical perspectives might be informing/moving Canadian social work toward a shared global ethics?

6. Is there a need for paradigmatic shifts in the way Canadian social work discourse/praxis re/conceptualizes itself within the Canadian as well as global context?

7. How does Canadian social work incorporate mindfulness in practice?

While this paper does not claim to find answers, my hope is that these and other questions will be explored throughout the thesis with the goal of stimulating debate and contributing to respectful meaning-building within the arena of critical social work discourse/praxis (meaning-building in the sense of ‘making meanings’ that support life-affirming, life-sustaining, critically hopeful notions of honouring ourselves, each other and the intrinsic value of all life forms, all relations and the planet we inhabit).

This thesis is contained within a variety of obvious limitations due to the multiple ways in which its design is developed through my personal interests, motivations and objectives that are based in my personal (socio-culturally anchored) identity pegs, worldview, values and ethics. The discussion offers one more partial perspective in the context of (post)modern debate, that is, its very real attempts at intersubjectivities via multiple sources and narrative creativity will be filtered (i.e., read, experienced and interpreted) through the paradigm of a single writer’s mind. The goal of any critically reflexive research must also be to work in full view and acute
consciousness of the personal lens that is at all times an integral part of one’s ontological and epistemological knowledge claims. Highlighting one’s partial perspective and the shifting inconsistencies within serves as a central strategy of social change research in the context of critical feminist standpoint theory (Haraway, 1988; Strega, 2005; Trinder, 2000).

With regard to ethical considerations, in a textual analysis the primary subjects/participants in this event are myself, the researcher/writer and you, the reader. Since we never operate within a vacuum but as embodied beings, as the researcher/writer I need to be fully present to my writing and alert to its many possible implications. Ethical accountability must be at the forefront of my theorizing. Likewise, theorizing and interpreting carries readers from their readings outward into their embodied daily world. At the same time, the more engaging the writing, that is, the more it contextualizes abstract theories into lived reality, the more willing readers may be to interact deeply with the material during reading and the more compelled they will feel to engage with the text, re/frame their worldviews and use the meaning they have built for themselves and others in their subsequent lived experiences.

Who am I writing for? My initial answer is - everyone. However, the question points to several challenges in the context of this paper: whereas the overall theme is straightforward, the terminology at my disposal is primarily used within academic texts and may discourage readers from outside the academic community. The irony being, of course, that broadening the audience base for this kind of research was one of the reasons I set out to write this paper in the first place. As well, academic requirements and regulations regarding the type of text and its ‘proper’ re/presentation (i.e., format, citations, continuous sourcing) put limits on its readability as an ‘organically grown’ piece of writing that would increase reader appeal. In the end, during the
writing I attempt to visualize family and friends around me, academic peers and people at work, to help guide me in shaping my writing to suit both my and their needs.

While I am under no illusion that the thesis will be a groundbreaking enterprise in the canon of social work literature, it will hopefully further contribute to challenging and expanding some of the conventional frameworks currently referenced in mainstream social work literature. In the context of knowledge transfer, the selected methodology will help to critique and deconstruct stories and discourse with a focus on opening up dialogue, offering additional angles for thought, and overall searching for insights and recommendations that are doable, current, hopeful and stimulating. The literature review will hopefully present further opportunities for readers to become acquainted with texts and in combinations they would otherwise perhaps not access. Including autoethnographic writings as legitimate, meaning-making scholarship broadens the established boundaries of what this type of scholarly thesis genre can and ought to re/present given its academic history.

One of the objectives of entering into a discussion of ecofeminism and spirituality in social work is to make it more widely accessible to programs, organizations, institutions, curricula. The combination of discursive and creative writing, selection of text and methodology will hopefully further open up the intriguing conversation around the potential of spiritual and feminist environmental considerations for social work as a decolonizing, global ethics. Other considerations are a) to further open up the traditional discourse of eurocentrically-based/oriented re/presentation of legislation and policy agreements to its own inconsistencies and social change inquiry, b) to demonstrate the significance of discourse and critical discourse analysis as actively invested praxis for political/social change, c) to help explore culturally

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5 I am referring here to the conventions of historically prescribed academic scholarship and the need to redefine what scholarship means and how it has to change in order to understand, embrace and re/present different ontological/epistemological pathways.
inclusive, anti-oppressive, feminist, environmental discourse in ways that is understood as ethically accountable and meaningful within the context of social work and social change, d) to help illuminate the ways in which Canadian social work discourse/praxis may be understood as spiritual practice carrying within it critical political, holistic, cosmological agency, e) to expand personal knowledge, understanding and commitment to social change discourse by critically examining my own location in the context of difference-centered anti-oppressive scholarship, and finally f) to practise critique passionately, creatively, and with hope.

I want to note that my discussion throughout the paper centers primarily on the intersections of globalizing (post)colonial oppressions/discourse, Aboriginal/Indigenous women and peoples, eurocentric/western/northern populations, social work and the nonhuman environment. I am acutely conscious that generalizing labels like ‘women’, ‘peoples’, ‘communities’ fail to account for the multiple differences, self-identities, needs and desires that each of us embrace as well as the multiple locations/roles we inhabit as care takers, persons with disabilities, elders, single parents, mothers, specific ethnicities and many others. I apologize for any simplistic generalizations and urge readers to be mindful of these limitations as they work their way through the thesis.
Overview of methodology

*Research methodologies and methods have been developed by people who see the world in particular ways, and every time a research tool is used, the researcher must be aware that it contains the perspectives of those who created it.*
(Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006, p. 19)

This thesis is a textual research collage, a blend of critical discourse/documentary analysis with autoethnography (i.e., personal experience narratives and poetry) which lie embedded within a framework of intersectional analysis. I have chosen intersectional analysis as the over-arching methodological framework to situate and highlight the discursive inquiry. The two methodological approaches support my inquiry and illuminate the interdependence between form, content and context. It is my hope that the inclusion of challenging and contradictory textual voices, insights and sharings will engage you, the reader and open up opportunities for further thoughts and insights.

Beginning with the premise that the goal of intersectional analysis advances the notions of social justice in identifiable ways, I have situated my discursive inquiry within intersectional analysis to explore the interconnections and interdependences (Hankivsky, Cormier & de Merich, 2009) between socially constructed categories like gender, culture, race and nature. My approach is twofold: first, I will examine ways in which power and power relations reveal themselves as the consequences of multiple oppressions (racism, sexism, naturism) through the cultivation of particular discourses like colonizing and legal discourses. The intersectional research paradigm helps to make visible how these discourses work to simultaneously produce, maintain and reinforce systemic inequalities. Using intersectionality as an analysis framework to explore (post)colonial discourse and anti-oppressive practice is particularly appropriate considering that it emerged out of Indigenous feminist, queer, (post)colonial and U.S. Black
feminist theories in the late 1980s (Hankivsky, Cormier & de Merich, 2009). As well, intersectionality increasingly is being used as a research tool in other disciplines like history, political science, economics, geography, sociology, cultural studies, and others. This is an important development because it facilitates transdisciplinary research and a greater willingness among researchers from diverse academic fields – used to working in well insulated isolation from each other – to collaborate on critical social issues that need urgent attention from a range of disciplines.

It is important to note that while intersectionality makes visible the interconnections of oppressive practices, it also enables us to acknowledge that in the process of interconnecting oppressions, the variables of oppression produce a type (or types) of compounded oppression that is more than the sum of the parts it started out with. The end result becomes an exponentially intensified, autonomous form of oppression that needs to be understood on its own terms (Mullaly, 2002). (It appears that this area is still being understood and examined in social work literature since its analysis carries enormous significance for developing appropriate strategies.) Using intersectionality as an analytical research paradigm provides opportunities for meaningful intervention strategies and alternative discourses that challenge the workings of oppressive processes. Exploring alternative discourses through intersectional analysis will shape the last part of this paper where I employ intersectional analysis to explore the interconnections between social work ethics, ecofeminism and spirituality. If we acknowledge that intersectional analysis can offer us critical insights into the processes of oppressive practices, then it follows that working from inside intersectional analysis may help to re/configure and re/conceptualize ontological and epistemological knowledge claims that challenge systemic inequalities and assist in dismantling them. Because my inquiry combines an analysis of people’s concrete, lived reality
(even if it is socially constructed) with critical theorizing, I use intersectional analysis as an over-
arching methodological approach to the conceptual-oriented methodology cluster of discourse
analysis and autoethnography.

This paper is a blend of autoethnographic writings (personal poetry and journal entries),
analyses of relevant social work and related literature, (cultural studies, feminist critiques, anti-
oppressive theory), as well as documentary research and analysis of policy reports and specific
legislation. I will refer to policy and legislative documents (Canadian Charter of Rights and
Freedoms, Indian Act, 2005 CASW Code of Ethics, 2007 First Nations Holistic Policy and
Planning Model, Aboriginal Women’s Health Research Synthesis Report, Beijing Declaration
and Platform for Action, the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, the United Nations
Universal Declaration of Human Rights and others) in order to explore aspects of these policy
and legal discourses in the contexts of (post)colonial discourse, the potential of (post)modern
social work and ecofeminism to gain critical insights into the continuous reframing of dominant
discourse within the context of globalization as it relates to social work praxis.

If we take a definition provided by Kirby, Greaves and Reid (2006) that “methodology is
a set of rules and procedures that indicates how research is to be conducted” (p. 12) then the
outline presented above seems to answer the necessary requirements of methodology. At the
same time this definition fails to embrace what may be the more significant part of methodology
analysis. I am referring to the conceptual nature of inquiry and the fact that, for example, part of
my inquiry is located in the theorizing and conceptualizing of discursive spaces in research. My
inquiry raises questions about the nature of ‘methodology’ as a term that lies embedded within
primarily eurocentric connotations. These questions become particularly relevant within research
that attempts to be anti-oppressive and find ways of decentering conventional understandings of
how research is done, the nature of the data collected and how they are interpreted. In chapters one and three I speak to implications regarding the embeddedness of ontological, epistemological, modernist and (post)modernist paradigms as they relate to my inquiry. This embeddedness shapes and defines what methodological analysis we use, how we understand data and what tools we employ to collect them.

The conceptual question for my inquiry is this: how do we make meanings that build alternative ethical foundations to those which helped to create the current global human-environmental crisis we are facing? To explore this question I need to challenge my/and my readers’ ontological and epistemological comfort zones. Challenging my own paradigmatic complacency of working within established meaning fields pushes me toward new ways of conceptualizing meanings, contexts, and the ethical nature of ethics (as politicizing agency). Outside of familiar context and research-belonging, a sense of uncertainty and exhilaration at the (for me) critically open-ended self-reflexive process accompanies the conceptual scope of my inquiry. Kovach (2005) speaks to the issue of reconceptualizing the notion of methodology. She writes,

[S]o how do epistemology and theory link with methodology? To understand this link, I had to grapple with what research methodology itself means. It appears that it can be either broadly or narrowly defined depending upon the perspective of the individual and the type of research....In the last few years there has been a surfacing of Indigenous peoples writing about Indigenous research. In conjunction with previous work, Indigenous research is fast becoming a methodology of its own. Shawn Wilson defines methodology: “when we talk about methodology, we are talking about how you are going
to use your ways of thinking (epistemology) to gain more knowledge about your reality.”  
(p. 29)

In view of the need to re/think familiar ways of knowing that speak meaningfully to anti-oppressive practice, I want to look beyond eurocentric boundaries to Indigenous understandings of research methodologies. As regards my inquiry, taken-for-granted concepts like methodology, data, ideas of input versus outcome/findings must take on new and unexpected meanings.

Language as a primary tool of communication and embodying thoughts becomes a consistently re/framing, potentially creative stream of polyvocal pathways. This suggests that I return to the definition of my methodology at the beginning of this sub-section that

[T]his thesis is a textual research collage, a blend of critical discourse/content analysis with autoethnography (i.e., personal experience narratives and poetry) which lie embedded within a framework of intersectional analysis. I have chosen intersectional analysis as the over-arching methodological framework to situate and highlight the discursive inquiry. The two methodological approaches support my inquiry and illuminate the interdependence between form, content and context. It is my hope that the inclusion of challenging and contradictory textual voices, insights and sharings will engage you, the reader and open up opportunities for further thoughts and insights. (p. 20)

The questions then become: what data am I collecting, and how am I collecting them, and, more importantly, what is my understanding of ‘data’? Given that my inquiry is built on a process-oriented methodology which enables me to deconstruct, decenter, shift and re/conceptualize meaning, I understand data as being the pathway materials that are involved in allowing me to conceptualize new ways of thinking, articulating, and doing/being. In other
words, I acknowledge methods themselves as being challenging data in their own right. Since I rely on language, text, and narratives as the pathway materials—or methods—that enable me to re/conceptualize and make meaning, I see language and the process of writing as data, together with data that emerge through content-specific insights. Recognizing language as innovative method is a more recent development in the social sciences (Tomm, 1995). But there is more to language, specifically from a (post)modern perspective: (post)modernism levels the playing field by suspecting all truth claims and insisting on the legitimation of a multitude of approaches (Richardson, 2003). In addition, the combination of (post)modernist and (post)structuralist thinking links language, subjectivity, social organization, and power. According to Richardson

[T]he centerpiece is language. Language does not ‘reflect’ social reality, but produces meaning, creates social reality. Different languages and different discourses within a given language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways that are not reducible to one another. Language is how social organization and power are defined and contested and the place where our sense of selves, our subjectivity, is constructed. Understanding language as competing discourses, competing ways of giving meanings and of organizing the world, makes language a site of exploration and struggle. (p. 508)

The question of collecting data in the context of this methodology needs to be reworked and turned into several different questions. I return to the central premise for my inquiry: I am interested in how we make meanings that build alternative ethical foundations to those which helped to create the current global human-environmental crisis we are facing. My findings will not merely be insights collected through what content information I have gathered and what I have discussed; my findings will certainly also be what pathways I chose during this discussion, how I used language as a way of knowing, as a method of inquiry, and what insights I garnered.
during my writing discovery. Consequently, questions that speak to the content inquiry of
intersectional analysis may address discursive inquiry at the conceptual level but in different
ways: Where have we chosen to situate ourselves as private and global citizens regarding the
continuous spiral of our un/knowing? How do we know we are in a healthier, more mindful
location than previously? What –if any –meanings have we built? What discursive strategies
have proven meaningful in the inquiry? What is the role of language in this kind of inquiry and
why? Where do we move from here toward further inquiry into these issues?
Writing and narrative strategies as research/methodological tools

How we are expected to write affects what we can write about. The referencing system in social sciences, for example, discourages the use of footnotes, a place for secondary arguments, novel conjectures, and related ideas. Knowledge is constituted as “focused,” “problem” (hypothesis) centered, “linear,” straightforward. Other thoughts are extraneous. Inductively accomplished research is to be reported deductively; the argument is to be abstracted in 150 words or less; and the researchers are to identify explicitly with a theoretical label. Each of these conventions favours —creates and sustains —a particular vision of what constitutes knowledge. (Richardson, 2003, p. 506)

At this stage in my personal/academic life I am increasingly concerned with streamlining and relating my interests in social work and other disciplines into a meaning-building, creatively entertaining, ongoing event that can offer adventurous, exploratory openings rather than closures to continuous discussions of holistic human-ecosocial wellness. While I appreciate the desire – and need - to condense a topic in order to contain its framework, I also realize that exploring diverse landscapes necessarily requires us to step outside established boundaries of conventional academic discourse agreements. Given the authoritative structure of academic social work training/curriculum, and given my personal/professional commitment to pushing boundaries toward greater human wellness in the spirit of critical social work, my efforts necessarily can be understood to balance creative/liberatory moments with those of lively adherence to current academic dictates regarding form and function.

The research topic I have chosen is situated within the practices and conventions of western/ized text and speech, and the particular meanings that are derived according to enshrined agreements and traditions (Harasym, 1990; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Words are marvellous instruments for creating intersubjective chaos and continuously interpretive meanings. They are also the most permanent yet malleable expression of humanity re/presenting multitudes and details of meaning that can be communicated across temporal/spatial distances, cultural
boundaries, or released as intimate dance within personal reflections. Levels of unconscious and strategic activism contained in words and their formulation into rituals of syntax, semiotic fields, languages and discourse paradigms embodied within contemporary social work discourse, I think, are the ultimate promise of great mystery and creative potential.

Writing as a strategic research tool, barely contained within modes of narrative inquiry, becomes the raw material for my thesis. Through juxtaposing formal and informal text and juggling third person pronouncements with first person intimacy, I hope to assist in the unravelling of hegemonic conventions regarding text and speech which we have learned to take for granted in academic, scientific and legal discourse as belonging to certain contexts, certain locations, and certain groups of people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, Wood & Kroger, 2000). The dynamics of privilege and elitism inherited within and between these discourses for the most part receive little attention since interrogating it would mean interrogating the owners/producers of these privileges and ultimately the notion and ethics of privilege itself. In the field of social work, this implicit agreement regarding the tradition of privilege encounters multiple obstacles and gestures of resistance, because part of the meaning of critical social work lies in the continuous self-interrogation of its own hegemonic origins. At the same time, the meta-rules and meta-structures for defining the permissible pathways of legitimate discourses have not changed, and thus the credibility and legitimacy criteria of social work discourse are still largely caught in the old paradigm. Where criticality regarding the social relations of discourse production becomes tricky is when the applicability and meaningfulness of critical social work discourse hinges on its ability to successfully destabilize and centre its own seat of power, and when the

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6 Gayatri Ch. Spivak uses the term “semiotic field” in her 1986 interview on *The problem on cultural self-representation* when she traces the problematics of cultural self-representation as a discursive practice across particular, strategic “semiotic sign-systems.” I am biased toward the idea of systems and the traditional positivist preoccupation of systematizing meaning into easily ‘slottable’ information units, and so the term “semiotic field” suggests to me more of the active, ongoing, organic quality of working with semiotics.
only way we can locate and define critical meaning involves radical shifts and transformations from the inside out – from the core of how/what we speak and not speak, who we (not) speak to/about, where we speak from and why. Ellis and Bochner (2000) explore the crucial issue of the crisis of representation that has continuously surfaced and is still being un/heard in most legitimized discourses - and to a great extent in critical social work discourse as well:

But we can ask why authors aren’t encouraged to write academic articles in the first person. [...] By not insisting on some sort of personal accountability, our academic publications reinforce the third-person, passive voice as the standard, which gives more weight to the abstract and categorical knowledge than to the direct testimony of personal narrative and the first-person voice. [...] Once the anonymous essay became the norm, then the personal, autobiographical story became a delinquent form of expression. (p. 201)

I would like to support what I perceive to be the researcher’s discursive responsibilities and mindful practice: to insert and insist on inserting her first-person voice, naming the location of (relative) privilege, positionality within context and experiential frame of reference. This not only establishes a reflexive ethical self-in-context care but also defines the collaborative and inclusive approach that is a mark of interdisciplinary, intersubjective multi-directional research-learning (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006). Using discourse/content analysis within an intersectional paradigm in combination with autoethnographic insights, my goal is to broaden the vocabulary for myself and others into a strategic chaos of multiple discursive practices enabling us as social work researchers, practitioners, theorists, educators and analysts to articulate creative meaning in ways that advocates for discursive meaning-building that is gender-specific, and more holistically oriented. One of my reasons for employing autoethnographic writings is that it
legitimizes the personal in the formulation of research and knowledge. In turn, we may feel more encouraged to write self-reflexively from the position of critical vulnerability (Heald, 2004). In addition, the merging of autoethnographic and critical essay format can be a powerful stimulation to writers and readers, as hooks (1999) suggests “it becomes ruthlessly apparent that unless we are able to speak and write in many different voices, using a variety of styles and forms, allowing the work to change and be changed by specific settings, there is no way to converse across borders, to speak to and with diverse communities” (p. 41).

Poetry is one of the ways I seek to challenge my own and readers’ connection to the deeply felt, raw moment of experience that explodes the myth of academic detachment. (Post)modern discourse pleasures the word, its multiple meanings and agency, it also opens up the linearity of particular ‘appropriate’ objectifying texts into textual meshwork and a pluralism of genres and styles to risk subjectivity. Language matters, and it is never neutral (Tomm, 1997). Somerville (2006) speaks to the importance of language in finding and doing ethics. She suggests that “[O]ne link between the sacred and ethics is that both are mediated, at least in part, through words, often in the form of poetry or poetic language. Poetry is the language of the human spirit, the language through which we have access to the inchoate worlds we must enter to fully experience our humanness....In particular, poetry is the major language of the imagination” (p. 69/70). At the heart of this paper lies my conviction that we can all come together as planetary beings in sharing a global ethics that will provide the framework toward respectful, sustainable interdependence. My use of personal poetry rests in my belief that poetic language connects us to the full spectrum of human ways of knowing, that through poetry we can access the interface between deeply embodied knowing and transcendental believing (believing in meanings that are beyond our physiological existence).
One of the pleasures of working within the field of social work is the recognition of the necessary interconnectedness of social work and other disciplines (Payne, 2005). With this in mind, I hope that the expansion of discursive practices will also transfer into social science academic discourses – particularly those of social policy and social science research - and be understood not merely as an optional tool but as a pedagogical responsibility - to ditch the traditional academic script and begin to re/tell stories using diverse languages and advancing intersubjective truths of difference-centred narratives/experiences, inviting those of teachers and students alike within a climate of interested mindfulness and collaborative creativity. As Bochner and Ellis (2003) assert,

A text that functions as an agent of self-discovery or self-creation, for the author as for those who read and engage the text, is only threatening under a narrow definition of social inquiry, one that eschews a social science with a moral center and a heart. Why should caring and empathy be secondary to controlling and knowing? Why must academics be conditioned to believe that a text is important only to the extent it moves beyond the merely personal? We need to question our assumptions, the meta-rules that govern the institutional workings of social science – arguments over feelings, theories over stories, abstractions over concrete events, sophisticated jargons over accessible prose. (p. 221)

As briefly summarized in the glossary, there are several (post)modern discursive strategies I employ in my writing: I will enclose the ‘post’ in (post)modernism in parentheses to signal its strong embeddedness as an inquiry of strategic resistance within the modernist paradigm. I will do the same with the ‘post’ in (post)colonialism since I question the eurocentric presumption of the transcendence of colonialism. T. Smith (2001) recounts the words of
Aborigine activist B. Sykes “who asked at an academic conference on post-colonialism, What? Post-colonialism? Have they left yet?” (p. 24). This is not a joke. As Smith contends, under the guise of new realities, “[N]ew analyses and a new language mark, and mask, the ‘something’ that is no longer called imperialism. For indigenous peoples, one term that has signalled the striking shift in discourse is ‘post-colonial’. Naming the world as ‘post-colonial’ is, from indigenous perspectives, to name colonialism as finished business” (p. 98). I will also write ‘eurocentrism’ and ‘eurocentric’ in lower case to emphasize the homogeneity of European and eurocentric culture as a globalizing force, and to highlight the diversity of Aboriginal/Indigenous cultures. Furthermore, at the beginning of most chapters (wherever I judged it appropriate) I have offered several quotations to spark the discussion and delineate the scope of the chapter heading. These quotations speak to the subsequent textual analysis: they are self-explanatory, that is, their message can be understood without elaborate discussion, however, the content may surface in the subsequent chapter. I have also incorporated running footnotes in an attempt to break up the text and stimulate the discussion through enriching, related information.
re-telling

is valid only
what we produce & someone recognizes
& confirms
offerings of numerals
the careful containment of objects
floating in glass jars
objectively pickled

is valid only
representing in a borrowed language
we are taught from birth
before language entered
like infants baptized
you & I unknown to each other

valid is more than a category
spaces we wilfully empty of interliving

valid are the breathless warbles of bluebirds
warm raindrops melting your parched skin
water pebbling through shallow eddies
the meaning of these relations & how they
convey multiple truths
where we know deep within our selves
& each other what these knowings mean & why

how will we know truths
in this nomenclature of disconnect
& attend to meanings as they present themselves
unheroic loving gestures
seeing our selves naked through each other’s eyes

be-coming into truths
are journeys
like self meaning & life

(Maria Walther, spring 2010)
Chapter Two: Literature review

The following pages summarize the literature primarily used in the thesis inquiry. I have provided a more detailed literature review of discourse analysis to emphasize its over-arching role and central significance throughout the thesis.

Overview of discourse and discourse analysis

Historically, expectations for social work theses have operated primarily along guidelines of quantitative/qualitative research models and subsequent discussions. Discourse analysis is only slowly enjoying the same popularity or consideration as a legitimate category of academic scholarship. Since our communication always takes place within some form of discourse, a literature review of discourse analysis and its implications for text, language and text-mediated research underscores the enormous significance of the embeddedness of discourses in Canadian social work praxis and its strategic meanings within the context of this thesis topic.

Discourse analysis as a primarily western tool of critical inquiry emerged alongside (post)structuralism (Van Dijk, 1997) in the 1960s across a variety of disciplines in the arts and social sciences (i.e., linguistics, literature, sociology, social psychology, anthropology, philosophy, political science, communication research, and others). Three broad dimensions of discourse - a) language use, b) the communication of beliefs (cognition), and c) interaction in social situations - lend themselves to breaking down some of the artificially constructed boundaries between the disciplines and opening up dialogue toward new, innovative ways of analyzing social relations using analysis of textual and discursive practices (Wood & Kroger, 2000; Van Dijk, 1997). While discourse analysis has been a multi-disciplinary tool of inquiry for a number of years, the emergence of discourse analysis as a social science methodology is fairly recent. According to Wood and Kroger (2000), discourse analysis does not merely function
as methodology but as a perspective on the nature of language and its relationship to the central
issues of the social sciences. Furthermore, discourse analysis consists of ways of thinking about
theoretical as well as metatheoretical elements of discourse, and constitutes therefore not just an
alternative to conventional methodologies, but an alternative to the perspectives in which those
methodologies are embedded.

Appadurai’s (2000) discussion illuminates the interrelations or blurrings between language,
words, the meanings they produce and the world they thus define and activate:

At the epicenter of current debates in and about culture, many diverse streams flow into a
single, rather turbulent river of many poststructuralisms (largely French) of Jacque Lacan,
Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, and their many subschools. Some of
these streams are self-conscious about language as their means and their model, while
others are less so. The current multiplicity of uses that surrounds the three words meaning,
discourse, and text should be sufficient to indicate that we are not only in an era of blurred
genres [...] but we are in a peculiar state that I would like to call ‘postblurring’. (p. 51)

Within the broad domain of social sciences, there are multiple – and interrelated -
conceptualizations of discourse and what might count as discourse, (i.e., spoken language,
written language, language use within stylistic, linguistic, cultural, symbolic and abstracted
contexts, etc.). While stating that there is no single meaning to discourse, Edgar and Sedgwick
(1999) suggest that within linguistics, discourse speaks to the ways in which linguistic elements
are conjoined so as to constitute a structure of meaning larger than the sum of its parts. In
Foucault’s view (1989), various social practices and institutions (education, politics, religion and
law) are both constituted by and situated within forms of discourse, that is, ways of speaking
about the world of social experience. A discourse in this view is a means both of producing and
organizing meaning within a social context. Language is thus a key notion, for it is language which embodies discourses. As such, a discourse constitutes a ‘discursive formation’, i.e., discourses are conceived of as signifying ways of systematically organizing human experience of the social world in language and thereby constituting modes of knowledge. For the purpose of discourse analysis as a strategy of inquiry within the interrelated arenas of social sciences, communication and education, Potter’s definition of discourse (1997) extends beyond a postmodern understanding of discourse and shifts its meaning toward an understanding of discourse as a process of ‘becoming’, as agency, and consequently discourse analysis as an analysis of people’s social practices:

[Discourse analysis] has an analytic commitment to studying discourse as texts and talk in social practices. That is, the focus is not on language as an abstract entity such as a lexicon and set of grammatical rules (in linguistics), a system of differences (in structuralism), a set of rules for transforming statements (in Foucaultian genealogies). Instead, it is the medium for interaction; analysis of discourse becomes, then, analysis of what people do. (p. 156)

This definition cultivates an understanding of discourse analysis as moving beyond being a medium for communication and descriptive functions to operating as a critical way of living and defining self-concepts. Within this context the analysis is situated at the micro level of syntax (order of words, phrases, clauses, and other properties of sentences in discourse) and semiotics (study of signs, visual aspects of language, ordered text), to levels of semantics (level of meaning: abstract, conceptual meanings of words, sentences, sequences of sentences and whole discourses) as well as processes of meaning assignments employed by linguists and cognitive psychologists (commonly defined as understanding, comprehension, interpretations,
which inform about the mind/ideology of language users). In addition, discourse analysis
differentiates between the micro level of analysis (level of sentences), and the macro level of
discourse, which considers discourse as a whole, and as juxtaposed, interconnected or
superimposed within the broad context of discursive streams (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Van
Dijk, 1997; Wood & Kroger, 2000).  

Language not only constructs meaning but also conceptualizes power and organizes it in
the form of cultural practices “through a complex interplay of non-egalitarian and fluid social
relations” (Dominelli, 2002). At the same time that language expresses and informs critical anti-
oppresive, egalitarian practices, it also defines, interrogates as well as creates multiply-
embedded voices, texts and discourses that speak to/from the speaker’s location, her/his
(de)privileged positionality. Emerging from the tradition of second wave feminists including
French feminists in the poststructuralist psychoanalytic traditions, feminists in the (post)modern,
(post)structuralist domains have deployed a particular deconstructing discourse to explore the
significance of language  

as a strategic construct toward establishing and reinforcing power
relations, specifically in the context of oppressions regarding gender, race and class. According
to D. Smith  

(1990) the primary ways in which our world is organized is mediated by texts,
which explore discourse and ideology as actual social relations organized in and through the
activities of people. This, Smith argues, turns discourse into an ongoing intertextual process, one
which relies on texts as something that ought not to be isolated from the practices in which they

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7 While my focus is on discursive formations at the macro level, I will also take a closer look inside documents like
the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights to look at discursive strategies at the micro level.
8 I am referring here to the notion of language both as la langue (culturally diverse languages) and the Saussurian la
parole, the system of strategically constructed signs and signifiers most often referred to in linguistically-oriented
discourse analysis.
9 I use first name initials to differentiate between Dorothy Smith and Tuhiwai Smith,
are embedded and organized. The reading/viewing of texts, how people organize their activities in relation to text, are essential to the investigating of textually mediated discourse.

Similarly to Smith’s observations, Spivak (1990) argues that in order for critical, gender/culture-specific discourse analysis to speak meaningfully to the problematics of cultural self-representations, attending to text is paramount if we want to uncover embedded relations of race, gender, class:

I think that the critic’s first task is to attend to the text. So that I try, knowing that of course it’s impossible to suspend myself, as it were. Having said this, I would add that my interests now, to an extent, are to be seen as in what way, in what contexts, under what kinds of race and class situations, gender is used as what sort of signifier to cover over what kinds of things. It really is a discovery which arises through actually attending to texts. (p. 48)

Spivak captures the essence of applied critical discourse analysis, through which scholars engage in issues of power abuse, dominance, oppressions and inequalities as they are constructed and reproduced in discourse (Van Dijk, 1997). Not only do critical discourse analysts take sides, they actively participate in uncovering, demystifying and challenging dominance within their discourse analyses. Critical discourse analysis is thus more issue-oriented than theory-focused, theories playing a role only in as far as they support a better understanding and critique of social inequality based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, origin, language, sexual orientations and other differences between people which are used in colonizing societies to construct oppressive, unequal power relations.

In contrast to conversation analysis which is seen as the most microanalytic variety of discourse analysis (Wood & Kroger, 2000), critical discourse analysis is macroanalytical, that is,
its concern lies with a more foundational examination of social and cultural practices and their interdependently enfolded relations regarding inequalities and resulting social problems (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Van Dijk, 1997). Of particular significance is the overlapping, closely connected relationship between poststructuralism and critical discourse analysis, since both are concerned with how language is actively invested in the construction of often unequal social relations and internalized oppression leading to negative self-perceptions for oppressed groups, and how it must be decoded to allow for meaningful insights and thus the necessary mobilization that would mark social change (Wood & Kroger, 2000). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) becomes a primary qualitative tool when applied to medical and legal discourses. Here, CDA emphasizes the construction and perpetuation of specific social categories that map out and trace people’s politics of oppression, such as, for example, the category of ‘family’ (Wood & Kroger, 2000) which re/presents a specific, superimposed set of social relations that contain crucial implications for the careful maintenance of power hierarchies both within as well as outside of its category.

In the context of anti-oppressive practice, social change work and Aboriginal research, the essential elements of critical discourse analysis – termed differently as deconstruction, renaming, re-claiming, recontextualizing, reframing, indigenizing - have been employed as empowering practices of radical decolonization. According to T. Smith (2001, p. 28), “a critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as Indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts. Every issue has been approached by Indigenous peoples with a view to rewriting and re-righting our position in history.” ‘Rewriting’ and ‘re-righting’ history summarize the two primary colonizing practices western imperialist nations have engaged in to
otherize and subjugate people and their cultures. The colonizing processes of othering people in hegemonic systems of oppressive classifications and categorizations are actively mediated through discourses of colonization which continue to be practiced in private/public institutions as (un)consciously normative. These practices, according to D. Smith (1990), are “constitutive of the formality of formal organization”, and are “not idiosyncratic but are embedded in and articulated with those of the extended social relations of the ruling apparatus. Textually mediated discourses interpenetrate and coordinate the schemata, categories, and the conceptual ordering of practices of ruling” (p. 219).

At the same time, T. Smith (2001) urges us to interrogate the reasons why “[M]any Indigenous intellectuals actively resist participating in any discussion within the discourses of (post)coloniality” (p. 14). It is unsurprising and must give scholars pause to hear her argue that it is “because post-colonialism is viewed as the convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world” (p. 14). Within the domains of cultural studies, education and social sciences, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars agree that academic institutions are primary strongholds actively driving the propagation of discourses of colonization and their ontological, epistemological guidebooks in the form of western-based, eurocentric research methods (hooks, 1990, 1999; Keeshig-Tobias, 2003; Kirby & Greaves, 2006; Kovach, 2005; Minh-ha, 1989; Potts & Brown, 2005): “Western disciplines are as much implicated in each other (my italics) as they are in imperialism. […] Discussions around the concept of intelligence, on discipline, or on factors that contribute to achievement depend heavily on notions about the Other. The organization of school knowledge, the hidden curriculum and the representation of difference in texts and school practices all contain
discourses which have serious implications for indigenous students as well as for other minority ethnic groups.” (T. Smith, 2001, p. 11)

Speaking, writing, reading, hearing, as well as other discourse semiotics (forms of textual, verbal, non-verbal communication) – we continually produce discourses as ways of engaging with each other and the (naturally and socially constructed) world around us. Yet rarely do we critically examine the construction of these discourses as in themselves practice-locations invested in specific ideological paradigms. We rarely interrogate the meaning of discourse as a historically implicated locus of formulating social relations. Even as scholars invested in language and what it obviously does, we (un)consciously continue to distinguish between language as merely talk when it is clear that language carries, mobilizes and drives agency and must be understood/witnessed as strategic action (Smith, 1990; Van Dijk, 1997; Wood & Kroger, 2000) with sometimes carefully orchestrated, sometimes un/foreseen consequences for ourselves and others caught/participating in this discourse. Denzin (1994) explains this underappreciated phenomena by suggesting that

[S]emiotics, in particular, has encouraged a view of texts as inherently ambiguous and unstable. The meaning of an interpersonal or technologically mediated text depends on its relationships to other texts, the competencies and interests of its interpreters, and the cultural conditions in which it is produced and read. The notion that meanings are continually constructed lies at the center of interpretive approaches in communication. This argument implies something very important: that how we describe the world constitutes what we describe. (p. 301)

In the wake of (post)modernity, the notion of discourse takes on more expansive meanings and even western academic disciplines According to Kress, Leite-Garcia and van
Leeuwen (1997) research has moved from narrow observations of texts as consisting only of linear linguistic signs to multi-modal texts which includes all written and spoken language of any cultural group. In addition, more consideration is given to the fact that even strictly linguistically re/presented texts are multi-modal, and that the increasingly wide range of modes carries specific meanings in particular cultures. Feminist (post)structuralism and critical discourse analysis, as discussed earlier, have a closely connected relationship in that both are engaged in uncovering the construction of politics of oppression through the agency of discursive practices. Both take on added meaning when understood, analyzed and deployed in the context of structural social work, for here the notion of social change becomes imperative as a natural/logical outcome of applied critical discourse within a feminist anti-oppressive culturally-bridging framework that seeks to be ethically accountable. It is in this location that I want to situate my research work and thus my self.

**Ecofeminist and spiritual perspectives in social work**

Historically, social work as a eurocentric discipline has operated on lobotomized people-in-environment theories (Mullaly, 2002; Payne, 2005), reducing them to focus on people and the social environment to the exclusion of the natural environment. As a result, these theories and their resulting practices have overlooked and ignored the reality of people’s inescapable situatedness within the natural environment, their efforts to manage/control it as well as the ongoing consequences of anthropocentrism on the physiological and psychological construction of people’s reality (Coates, 2003). The past ten years have seen changes to this traditional stance.

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10 Written language always needs inscription material – rock, clay, paper, plaster, brass, plastic, electronic screens, etc.; decisions have to be made re. shape/style/colours of letters, spacings, spatial display, general/specific layouts, etc.;
and increasingly, social work theory, ethics and practice are opening up slowly to some of the
deeper potential of ecosystems theories (Payne, 2005). The people-versus-their-environment axis
has traditionally been at the core of social work in its most generic form. However, if social work
wants to contribute in meaningful ways to new global envisionings, it needs to integrate the
ecological paradigm as a central part of its philosophies, theories, ethics and praxis (Besthorn,

While the natural environment has always been a major source of healing, empowerment
and wealth for Indigenous cultures, environmental degradation and the oppression of Indigenous
peoples are part of the same paradigm of continuous eurocentric colonization (Minh-ha, 1987; T.
Smith, 2001). The global crisis of survival we face today as a species is directly related to the
western eurocentric colonizing/mechanistic worldview that operates on principles of
unsustainability and short-term monetary profiteering by a few (Besthorn, 2002; Jaffe & Gertler,
2008).

Ecofeminism emerged in industrialized nations as a self-defined political movement in
the 1970s and 1980s (Sturgeon, 1997) at the beginning of the third wave of feminism as a critical
postmodern, (post)colonial feminist analysis of the symbiotic relationship between
environmental destruction and women’s oppression, particularly the systemic oppression of
women of colour throughout the world (Mies & Shiva, 1993; Plant, 1989; Sahtouris, 1989;
Spretnak, 1997). With its beginnings anchored in the cross-fertilization between activist grass-
roots initiative and critical analysis, ecofeminist theories are slowly being integrated into the
existing social work canon as transformative perspectives and theories (Payne, 2005).

Deep ecology, ecofeminism and (post)modern critiques by writers from nations
historically subject to colonization have provided relevant arenas and significant intersections for
critical considerations of holistic and spiritual practices in the conceptualization and application of social work. While the need for and applicability of spirituality in social work seems to continue on as a lively debate among theorists and practitioners, definitions and analysis of spirituality and spiritual aspects in mainstream Canadian social work programs/textbooks are still suspiciously vague to the point of being smoothly subsumed by more foregrounded themes (Payne, 2005; Heinonen & Spearman, 2006; Turner, 2002). Whether it is because social work has only recently begun to embrace the idea of spirituality as a meaningful element of social work praxis (Canda, 2006), or whether the historical tradition of the western social work model as a form of Christian religious charity has rejected concepts of spirituality, an analysis of spirituality as essential thematic consideration that winds itself through social work praxis seems still in its infancy in the broad Canadian social work curriculum (Coholic, 2002). Increasingly, however, social work is opening itself up to the knowledge that spiritual consciousness, ritual and traditions have always been at the very core of non-western ontological paradigms. The process of globalization and transnational capitalism as well as the growing multicultural mosaic of many historically homogeneous nations (including Canada) is exposing eurocentrism to the critical gaze and analysis of traditionally ‘otherized’ worldviews.

Combined with an acknowledgment of the rising global crisis of environmental destruction and related challenges, notions of what it means to be fully human in the context of diverse spiritual, holistic, ecological understandings of people’s lived experiences needs to become a priority of how we define social work (Besthorn, 2002; Canda, 2002, 2006; Coates, 2003; Derezotes et al, 2008; Jaffe & Gertler, 2008; Lincoln, 2000; Weaver, 2008). In a parallel development, there is a call for incorporating spirituality into social work pedagogy and curriculum starting at the undergraduate level (Baskin, 2002; Clews, 2004; Coholic, 2003).
Notwithstanding spirituality’s small profile in mainstream social work texts, more specifically oriented scholarship has experienced recent and flourishing interest regarding conceptualizations of spirituality as ways of reframing our understanding of social work. Increasingly, inquiries into the history, role and potential of spirituality in the North American social work domain are launched across the entire social services spectrum (Baskin, 2002; Clews, 2004; Hodge, 2006; Krug, 2006). According to Canda and Fuhrman (1999), spirituality and social work have enjoyed a dynamic relationship throughout the history of social work. Its latest resurgence originated at the start of the new millennium and has focussed on spiritual principles in micro practice as well as conceptual frameworks for international dialogue regarding religious and spiritual perspectives meaningful to social work (Payne, 2005).
Chapter Three: Knowledge claims and paradigms

This chapter highlights some of the critical issues regarding knowledge claims in social work and how our inquiries are part of the socio-culturally constructed, continuously re-interpreting cyclicalities of experiences, discourse, ethics, and ideologies. The chapter draws attention to social work’s location in relation to modernist and postmodernist assumptions and the impact this has for shifting ontological and epistemological paradigms.

Ontological/epistemological knowledge assumptions

An ontology is a theory about what the world is like –what the world consists of, and why. Another way of thinking about ontology is to think of it as a world view. The world view of the researcher shapes the research project at every level because it shapes a researcher’s epistemological foundation. An epistemology is a philosophy of what counts as knowledge and ‘truth’; it is a strategy by which beliefs are justified. Epistemologies are theories of knowledge that answer information about who can be a ‘knower’, what test, beliefs and information must pass in order to be given the status of ‘knowledge.’ (Strega, 2005, p. 201)

Part of what drives social change research and/or transformative social research is its commitment to define and present its ontological framework and resulting research paradigm overtly and explicitly. This commitment underscores the entire research/practice, shapes the essential grid of values, perspectives, ethical and methodological considerations and ultimately helps to define its outcome. Regardless of the kind of research paradigm we advocate i.e., instrumental, interactive, critical (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006), there invariably emerge fundamental questions regarding the voice and location we privilege which in turn defines the epistemological framework that provides the tools to conceptualize the research we do and how we interpret and evaluate it.

The challenge is how to do research while cultivating a (self)critical consciousness regarding the significance of this grid. Yet, even now, at the beginning of the third millennium,
there continues to be something of a collective hesitation in postmodern social work research regarding the critical examination of the origins and pathways of knowledge, their strategic interpretation and the shifting location of ethics (Trinder, 2000; Rossiter, 2000; Rossiter, Prilleltensky & Bowers, 2000). This hesitation exists in many college/university curricula as well as in the public and private arena of social work research, theory and practice. Like other disciplines, social work is embedded within competing superstructures of knowledge re/presentation and hegemonic relations. Unlike many other disciplines, social work as a form of critical inquiry seeks to deconstruct the elements that craft, maintain and reinforce social relations of power and finds itself therefore challenged through its own self-identified mandate. The challenges contained in social work’s self-identity, I suggest, are simultaneously those of negotiating and integrating the contradictions between notions of modernity and post/modernity, of re/presenting a body of knowledge, power and agency and simultaneously taking it apart to expose its ideological premise, according to its subject position (Pease & Fook, 1999).

Historically, careful distinctions are drawn between various persuasions of science and uneasy boundaries mark discipline territories and the sociocultural and economic status/prestige that comes with them. It is as if acknowledging our inextricably embodied experience as the core agency of scientific interest/interpretation might negatively impact and devalue the process/result of research and theorizing. But what is the alternative? Can we ever speak from a disembodied context? Does not the willingness to self-critically deconstruct our personal locations/agenda as researchers and persons who are deeply, ongoingly, embedded within cultural, socio-economic constructed landscapes guarantee a greater degree of transparency in the work being done? And does not this continuous effort toward greater transparency produce more honest research and research processes, and therefore more challenging inquiry?
Some of the questions pertaining to ontological and epistemic knowledge claims that need to be consistently illuminated in research are: where does (my) knowledge come from? How do we know what we know? What position are we speaking from in the complex arena of personal agendas and collective politics at all levels of our lived experiences? What are our agendas and why? Who is allowed to speak and who is not? Why not? Does the predominance of certain discourses over others impact how and what we know? Who gets to define and impose what knowledges are and are not? How does the marginalizing and silencing of certain discourses affect the conceptualization of ontological/epistemological knowledges? What are the social relations of knowledge production? Is there such a thing as ‘pure’, that is, uncontaminated, uncorrupted knowledge, and is this relevant? Is knowledge always a social construct, or can we access knowledge outside of human experiences and interpretations? What are the relationships between knowledge, power and agency? Does my socio-cultural, economic position help to define my voice and its agency? What will I do with my assumed knowledge claims? Can we ever distil knowledges/truths from the discourses that help to design, frame and contextualize them? How is the notion of culture implicated in the creation of knowledge and discourse?

These and many other questions, whether we recognize and cultivate them, unarguably shape the kinds of research we do (Duran, 2001; Fawcett & Featherstone, 2000). Furthermore, the dis/inclination to contemplate epistemological and ontological frameworks that conceptualize research continually promotes particular strategies in the construction of the social relations that produce, present and maintain knowledge and its brokered offspring – power, mostly power-over (Oliver, 1992). Exploring these issues becomes increasingly significant, for example, in the global context of colonialism and anti-oppressive social work praxis when the intersections
between oppositional discourses become the contested sites for transformational ontologies and epistemologies (T. Smith, 2001).

Within the context of conceptualizing ontologies/epistemologies that challenge existing dominant knowledge sites and promote anti-oppressive, just alternatives, I offer the following considerations which constitute a critical amalgamation of (post)modern, (post)structuralist feminist, ecofeminist, Indigenous, anti-oppressive perspectives as a provisional template (Lorde, 1984; Minh-ha, 1987; T. Smith, 2002): that the entry points for our inquiries are our human bodies, their embodied conditionalities; and that the framework for our analysis of critically examining our ontological/epistemological knowledges and their discursive formulations lies in the diversity of interconnections between our embodied existences and their/our social and natural environments, i.e., the embodied, material nature and conditionalities of all of life around us. This is where our critical reflexivity begins and returns to in ever increasing spiralling loops of inquiry. Our inherent grounding in our bodies challenges us in several ways: the bodily grounded connectivity between physiological, emotional, mental, psychological, spiritual and other ways of experiencing and re/interpreting life reminds us not to privilege one way of knowing over another. It also challenges us to consider the partiality of our knowing because we are one body among many, one life form among many life forms - consequently, the truth we experience can only ever be a partial truth (Tomm, 1997).

This grounded, horizontally-relational understanding enables us to critically examine the interdependence of all peoples and all of life on this planet. It helps us to conceptualize interdependencies and living arrangements that are just, respectful and life-affirming. Acknowledging and cultivating embodied consciousness of all life forms opens up ontological/epistemological paradigms that are interrelational rather than binary/oppositional,
that are fluid, process-oriented rather than static, and are healing and peace-promoting rather than divisive and oppressive.
Cyclicality of knowledge production
I understand knowledge production to be a process that is continuous, multi-streamed, strategically chaotic and cyclical; that is, interpretations and reinterpretations of events/experiences take place at the same time that our discursive, ethical, ideological and ontological, epistemological inventories are shaped, reinvented and reproduced, and re/framed. This applies to individual and social spheres.


**Problematics of modernism and (post)modernism**¹¹

The embeddedness of my inquiry into culturally sensitive feminist environmental, anti-oppressive social work discourse and spirituality necessarily locates it inside the domain of what is termed (post)modernity. (Post)modernity did not fall into history as a specific moment but as a evolving process (Fawcett & Featherstone, 2000). My analysis is located within the general debate of these continuously evolving, interrelated series of cause and effect, and, therefore, becomes by definition a part of the (post)modern discourse. At the same time, it explores aspects of the tensions and contradictions between modernist assumptions of subjectivity and superior knowledge claims to human social relations and (post)modern deconstruction of those assumptions (Mullaly, 2002). For these reasons, I will briefly summarize the most pertinent thoughts as they relate to this paper.

According to Fawcett and Featherstone (2000), theorists vary in their assessment of (post)modernity: some argue that “postmodernity is a new condition or a continuation of changes intrinsic to modernity” while others suggest that (post)modernity constitutes a form of “historical amnesia in that it encourages a failure to look at continuities and to recognise how changes today merely represent forms of restructuring class relations in the pursuit of profit accumulation. Yet, others see (post)modernity not as a legitimate entity but as another phase within the complexity of modernity (2000, p. 9). Pease and Fook (1999) cite Leonard as suggesting that (post)modernism is a continuation of emancipatory struggle against domination under changed historical conditions.

Perhaps two related conclusions can be drawn in view of the ongoing debate around (post)modernity’s legitimacy: 1. (post)modernism, because of the intense debate surrounding it quite obviously has become the necessary next step in the discursive analysis of the

¹¹ For the purpose of this thesis, I am using the terms postmodernism and postmodernity interchangeably.
re/presentation and construction of knowledge and power, and 2. we always search for causal
relations and historical explanations of how/why events take place. The world did not simply fall
into (post)modernism. Historical conditions developed to nurture the emergence of an inquiry of
destabilization we call (post)modernism. In the domain of social science discourse and research,
(post)modern/(post)structuralist analyses of the inherent locus of language and its discourses as
inescapable re/presentations of the social relations of power (Foucault, 1989) have decentered
traditional notions of guaranteed objectivity and neutrality of observations. This kind of
(post)modern analysis has designed new research strategies and ways of interpreting findings in
order to build and maintain increasing self-reflection on claims to truth and knowledge.
However, the question becomes: has (post)modern inquiry dislodged the claims to universal
truths and omnipotence that historically have marked the dominant discourses of modernism?
Can we justifiably ask this question, or is part of the very definition of (post)modernism that it
can have no overarching objective in relation to anything, including modernism? Like many, I
question the term (post)modernism in its most fundamental meaning in that I think that while we
may have uncovered a helpful understanding of modernism, modernist reality holds us as much
as ever. We are nowhere near a ‘post’-experience of the concept of the white male subject as the
decision-making locus, ‘he’ is still the otherizing point of reference wherever we happen to
operate in this new global millennia world-reality (Brodribb, 1992). As Tomm (1995) writes,

[I]n my view, arguments for gender neutrality that exclude sex difference are a form of
postmodern essentialism: women are essentially the same as men in that neither has a
subject position as ‘I’. The irony is that this doctrine of postmodern essentialism was
initiated by men who had a strong sense of ‘I’ which was in jeopardy of being dislocated
by the presence of women claiming their own subjectivity. The obvious move was to
dislocate them first. (p. 126)

Neither has the grand narrative lost its power as a measuring and contextualizing paradigm that
knowledge and systems of knowledge production are evaluated against and subsequently
subsumed within. Given our corporeal body and its physiological, material reality, we will
remain tied into the paradigm of modernity. Even cyberspace is a linear continuation of a
concrete contested hegemonic body-as-subject reality which transfers itself in information
aggregates onto a screen and is blasted around the world in a network narrative for those bodies
a) sufficiently privileged to be able to log on and b) sufficiently privileged to build and cultivate
the necessary literacy (Jaffe & Gertler, 2008).

I suggest that, in social work, we need to build new meanings to define our
modernist/postmodernist location: neither the grand narrative and its insistence on one truth nor
the fragmentation of this truth into ever more disparate and disconnected, random bits of
interpretations can serve the challenges of contemporary social work. For one, (post)modernism
fails to recognize/acknowledge the idea of mindfulness; in all its insistence on deconstruction it
does not pick up the shards of meaning toward purposefulness, toward an intentional collectivity
regarding social change that insists on strategic anti-oppressive practice (Sturgeon, 1997). This
becomes particularly evident in debates regarding essentialization of concepts and socially
constructed categories, i.e., ‘women’ and ‘nature’. (Post)modernism can only take us so far in the
inquiry toward social realities and working truths – its very insistence on deconstructing and
re/interpreting human (eurocentric?) tendencies toward totalization ultimately prevent us from
mobilizing ourselves politically and developing agency. Modernism and (post)modernism clash
along the fault lines of the lived reality of basic human needs which remain unchanged:
adequate, affordable housing, nutritious foods, affordable health care, self-determination, meaningful relationships, equal access to human rights and recreational, educational and economic opportunities. In the face of ongoing accelerated planetary degradation and destruction, the objective for social work necessarily becomes a strategic effort to integrate modernist and (post)modernist contexts toward the alleviation of injustice and the improvement of conditions to support a multiplicity of egalitarian human experiences on this planet (Coates, 2003). In view of this challenge, we recognize the potential of (post)modernism as a way of opening up into uncertainties and negotiate the contradictions in our lives as a way of inquiry – for example, the significant insight (Bishop, 1994) into being the oppressor and being oppressed at the same time as we acknowledge people’s experiences as lived and physiologically embodied.
...stealing meanings from languages we never live

there we struggle to pull out new from old language games only they are not new they do what all language organisms do pushing & prodding closer to the essence of meaning-idea the thing itself or so we suspect which continues to exist just outside our thought-approximations that produces language and always forever the language continues to fail us because how can it not

whereas language is subject to the regulatory systems that define who speaks through whose, who shall remain silent by whose cunning insistence who shall devote meaning to serve whom – and why – we simply want to ask?

but see this is turning into a curiosity look at its syntax appreciate the symbolic sign of expectancy curved just so inside dominant rules believe these words are dangerous they inspire intrigue they don’t belong not in that order nor in this context we know better we need to conform after all we know the rules want to belong want to belong want to belong want to be

always there are the stolen words words cut from the lips of those silenced beneath while they sing the meaning of lives into their rare spaces

these are the unforgotten words whose meanings continue to perforate colonizing discourse and escape from the colonizers’ rules of liberation these words are sneaky and wild they burst with spectacular abundance they proclaim the sacredness of their original homes, their cultural belonging

this is no small matter

but no there are ground rules we are told think nothing of it except that it’s universal cultural custom there is nostalgia of course creative even to be expected in the CANONICAL ORDER OF THINGS we simply align the prescriptive format of dominant discourse politics its integrative power under home rule and how subtly it normalizes inconsistencies of meaning realities and proclaims renames its shifty contradictions deconstructive agency and of course we name this entertaining debacle post in modern globalizing meaning-fare

there are meanings whose meanings we must leave alone they are meant not for us not for us who have long ago left our own belonging who roam the symbolic and hunt prehistoric carve out mystical ritual as patent

how they mock written language’s flattened signature as they inhabit the Imaginary on their terms
critically embodied

It is 9:00 am and I sit at the laptop working on my thesis draft. Around my apartment on 12th street traffic rushes past, the world flutters and swerves crazily, noisily. For every word typed I seem to erase twenty that fail to build meaning the way I intend them to. The cat has rolled onto his back, whiskers twitching, snoring. The dog rests uneasily, casts soulful eyes at my laptop. It is a slow meticulous process.

In the basement suite downstairs, the man has just returned, slams the door behind him, the walls tremble. “You fuckin’ bitch, you! You fuckin’, fuckin’ bitch!! You’re nothing but a fuckin’ piece of fuckin’ shit fuckfuckfuckfuck I want you fuckin’ outta here you stupid fuckin’ cow fuckin’ stupid bitch after all I’ve done for you fuckfuckfuck...!” There is door-slamming, the sound of heavy footsteps following a woman’s low voice zig-zagging across below my feet, her voice speaking in stops and starts, drowned out each time after the first few syllables. More yelling and door-slamming. Through the hollow apartment floor we can hear everything he tells her. After approximately one hour of this the stationary sound of explosions and machinegun fire erupt from the downstairs living room corner. All this becomes a daily routine.

I called the police. The woman at the station promised that an officer will be right over as soon as there is any kind of violence to report. She did take time out to ask me if I had heard anything that would conclude violence. I asked her politely what she thought I had described to her. There was silence on the other end. Then, no, she said, other sounds. What kinds of sounds I asked. Again silence, then she said, well, sounds of violence. There are a young woman and a seven year-old child downstairs. The landlord, recently separated with shared custody of a three-year old daughter, refuses to get involved, wants to know if I can ‘compromise with the downstairs folk’. Compromise? I ask him: how do you compromise with someone’s violence? He looks at me. I ask him whether he thinks it’s okay for my two children to witness and be exposed to this violence on a daily basis. I ask him if he would consider living with his daughter in this apartment under these circumstances. He says he needs to know if I plan on moving out. He says he needs to find tenants who will not raise a fuss. I use duct tape in our bedroom to keep the noxious smell of crack cocaine from drifting up through the heat vent.

A few days later, I wake up at 3:20 am in the morning. Below, I hear him chasing and hitting her, hear her crying and running to another room, then the sequence repeats itself, back and forth through the apartment. He screams at her, accusing her of hiding his crack paraphernalia, of playing it up to his friends. In the dark I feel my way into another corner of my apartment to call 911. I let the police know that upstairs we can hear everything. I tell the officer what I heard. When the police arrive half an hour later, I hear the woman say the noise must have been caused by some rough sex they had. The officer calls me later to repeat this. We talk. He says that unless she testifies against him they won’t be able to help her. There was no mention of the child and his safety. Through the door connecting the upstairs and downstairs, the man is yelling, threatening us. The door is still without the bolt I had asked the landlord to install. I make plans for us to stay in a motel until I can find other accommodations.

Meanwhile, I return to work on my thesis draft which discursively explores the holistic landscape of Canadian social work, its empowering vision of equality, equal access to opportunities, personal/collective healing and empowerment. Its potential towards a shared global ethics.

(Maria Walther, fall 2009)
Chapter Four: Social work at the intersection of Canadian gender justice, social justice, cultural justice – unframing the “post” in Canadian (post)colonial context

The male missionaries, the male Indian agents, male traders and the male European clergy often found themselves bargaining with Aboriginal women at contact, and each refused to accept the emancipated position of Aboriginal women. It is these same actors, confronted with emancipated Aboriginal women, who put in motion a process for furthering the purposes of white society. Those purposes included the destruction of women’s place in Aboriginal society, as well as destroying Aboriginal cultures as they found them. Since 1869, Indian women were legally subordinated through banishment from their communities for intermarrying with white men. Professor Mary Ellen Turpel has argued that the banishment of “First Nations” women from their communities was a deliberate federal government policy to destroy Aboriginal culture and communities. (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 1991, p 4)

We can be proud that social justice is at the very soul of social work and embedded in the ethical codes of our professional associations. It brings us together in a common cause with people from all walks of life across the globe. Ours is a unique profession that seeks to create the conditions that will ultimately end the need for its expertise. (Hemingway, 2009)

The social work profession is dedicated to the welfare and self-realization of all people, the development and disciplined use of scientific and professional knowledge, the development of resources and skills to meet individual, group, national and international changing needs and aspirations, and the achievement of social justice for all. The profession has a particular interest in the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and/or living in poverty. Social workers are committed to human rights as enshrined in Canadian law, as well as in international conventions on human rights created or supported by the United Nations. (CASW Code of Ethics, 2005, p 3)

In this chapter I will explore the location of Canadian social work at the intersections of social, cultural, gender and environmental in/justices. My inquiry will focus on ways in which these domains lie embedded within each other – in the Canadian and global context – as well as how Canadian social work, as specified in the CASW Code of Ethics (2005), defines itself in relation to these contexts. Choosing an intersectional approach is central to my analysis. Since intersectionality bases its analysis on lived experience to formulate theories toward the pursuit of social justice and foregrounds social categories as being dynamic, historically grounded, socially

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12 This quote is taken from an article titled ‘Social justice: The soul of social work’ Dawn Hemingway wrote for the BCASW newsletter Perspectives upon learning of her selection for the 2009 CASW Distinguished Award (BC)
constructed and working within both micro and macro structural levels (Hankivsky, Cormier & De Merich, 2009). Intersectional analysis typically centres around the dynamics of social identity categories (race, ethnicity, Indigeneity, gender, class, sexuality, geography, age, ability, immigration status, religion and others) and their impact on oppressive systems and processes.

The purpose of my inquiry is threefold: to further help articulate implications for social work regarding a) an analysis of the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman inequalities, b) the increasing erasure of traditional state/nation boundaries in favour of seamless borders of transnationally organized, geographically dispersed corporate terrains, and c) the ethical tenets prescribed in the 2005 CASW Code of Ethics that form a critical frame of reference for Canadian social workers in the world of (post)modern and (post)colonial globalization. This chapter does not presume to be exhaustive but to highlight certain connections and bring into focus strands of theories and debates that call for further social work analysis as we move into the third millenium. In exploring (post)colonialism as a site of people’s ongoing social, cultural and gender struggles that are centered in systemic oppressions of their specific material, lived conditions I will look at how the CASW Code of Ethics as a discourse relates to some of these struggles.

Two of the primary contextualizing references for social workers lie in our personal location of values, assumptions and contradictions as well as the professional location of specific and overarching codes of ethics13. Both reference domains consist of culturally constructed, prescribed agreements which we continuously re/negotiate to create meaning and engage in

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13 Canadian social workers negotiate multi-layered codes of ethics, comprising the provincial, national and in some cases Aboriginal/First Nations codes. As well, many social workers straddle two or more professional rubrics and must find ways to mediate differing ethical prescriptions.
interventions that are valuable to our clients (Payne, 2005). Whereas ethical locatedness in our personal lives is an intensely subjective variable we as workers shape throughout our lives, the provincial/national codes of ethics present unilaterally set guidelines for all registered (and many unregistered) Canadian social workers living/working in Canada and abroad. As primary resources they are used to clarify, support and reinforce appropriate ethical behaviour. They also reflect the changing values of a dominant eurocentric society and have moved from a focus on advocacy and oppressive institutions to workers' obligations to their workplace and profession, and, in recent years to increased attempts to incorporate some considerations regarding the effects of globalization, social responsibility and environmental justice (Kreitzer, 2006).

According to Adams, Dominelli and Payne (2002),

> The statements in the codes of ethics seem to prompt other questions such as 'how do I respect clients as individuals?'. Codes of practices have as much to do with the establishment of a sense of professional identity for national or international professional social work organizations as providing answers to questions such as 'how ought social workers behave toward their clients?' yet the codes purport to provide such help! They do offer some guidance, but at a very general level. Whatever the extent of the contribution that professional codes of ethics make toward enabling good professional practice, they can only be truly effective if they are an integrated part of the structural arrangements of a fully regulated profession: that is, there must be sanctions if the code is broken. To date, such enforceable codes of ethics have not existed in most countries. (p. 35)

What I find of particular interest here is the ethical codes' twofold purpose of providing ethical mandates for organizations and guidelines for workers' view of and relationship with their

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For most social workers, an employer in form of agencies, non-profits, the government and others presents the third contextualizing domain. Another predominant reference domain constitutes the client's paradigm of experiences, values and beliefs.
clients. These two tenets work together to establish a social work identity, within itself as a complex web of regulated values as well as with its social contexts, from micro settings to the macro domain of relations across political and cultural boundaries.

One of the tenets of (post)modernism has been its insistence on inconsistencies and strategic contradictions in the ways dominant meanings are created and reinforced as knowledge. Canadian social work has integrated this analysis and in the process has build social work approaches, such as radical, structural and critical social work that critically examine social work’s collusion with dominant ideologies/discourses in efforts to deconstruct and decenter them (Adams, Dominelli & Payne, 2002; Mullaly, 2002; Payne, 2005; Pease & Fook, 1999). Feminist, anti-oppressive, Aboriginal and Indigenous theories as well as environmental theories are mobilizing social work to define itself as a critical pedagogy and politics of empowerment and difference (Besthorn, 2002; Graveline, 1998; Kovach, 2005; Sundar & Todd, 2008; Zapf, 2006).

In the wake of social work’s move toward increased professionalization and institutionalization, two main challenges for social work practitioners are how to retain – and build on – insights generated through (post)modern perspectives of social work as the strategic locus for critical, political agency, and conversely how to resist being subsumed into the increasingly corporate, standardizing cultures of governments, academic institutions and accreditation regulations. If, as Hemingway eloquently suggests, “social justice is at the very soul of social work and embedded

15 Throughout the paper I will refer to Aboriginal peoples in the Canadian context since this is how many Aboriginal women’s organizations refer to themselves and each other. I also respect the wish expressed at the Beijing Declaration of Indigenous women in 1995, “[T]hat the ‘s’ in term Indigenous ‘peoples’ be put in all United Nations documents, declarations, and conventions. That, hereafter, we will not be referred to as ethnic minorities or cultural communities but as Indigenous peoples” (See references). According to T Smith, “the final ‘s’ in Indigenous peoples has been argued for quite vigorously by Indigenous activists because of the right of peoples to self-determination. It is also used as a way of recognizing that there are real differences between different indigenous peoples. The term has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena” p 7
in the ethical codes of our professional associations”, we need to ask: how does the CASW Code of Ethics (2005) position itself in relation to (post)colonial struggles for gender, social, cultural and ecological justices? But, and perhaps more importantly, how embedded within (post)colonial discourse is the code itself? Two domains interrelate with each other: the set of values/ethics articulated in the code, its content, as well as the ontological and epistemological frames of reference that constitute context and regulate the code’s discursive strategies.

The gradual internationalization of eurocentric culture, the fallacy of capitalistic paradigms regarding infinite economic growth, transnational capitalism and the continuation of (post)colonial slave labour, the accelerating piracy of intellectual property rights of Indigenous peoples, the increasing toxification and commodification of finite public goods (soil, water, air and ecosystems) globally for private ownership/profit, the collusion of overconsumptive nations in these embedded, destructive global practices and the resulting injustices across the spectrum of cultural, social, gender and ecological contexts, all these interconnected processes call for heightened consciousness and a continuous willingness to examine our selves, our professions and the ontological, epistemological foundations of the social work profession itself (Dalrymple & Burke, 2006; Mullaly, 2002). Some of the questions that we as social work practitioners raise include: what relevance do concepts like anti-oppression, ecojustice and feminist work have in postmodern Canadian social work? Where is Canadian social work located as critical praxis in the context of Canada’s ongoing legacy of Aboriginal/First Nations assimilation politics? How effective, empowering and committed in its visions and mandates can Canadian social work be given its historical embeddedness within socio-cultural, economic, legal and health discourses that are colonizing and oppressive? Is there a call for Canadian social work to reframe itself within the context of Canadian (post)colonialist and global challenges? How can we as Canadian
social workers and globalized citizens work to ensure vigorous and continuous ethical reflexivity within our professions? I need to clarify that I do not have answers to these and other emerging questions, but I hope that exploring strategies of dominant discourse will help illuminate the complexities of these issues and their interconnections.

Let me speak to the social work challenges regarding Canadian (post)colonialism, and more specifically, to the need for deconstructive literacy in locating and negotiating anti-oppressive social work in the context of colonial legislation and bureaucracy. As social work practitioners, our critical awareness regarding the plurality of our own interlocked identities offers us opportunities to witness, and wherever possible, negotiate some of the strategic contradictions/conflicts inherent in the genderization and racialization of socio-cultural practices and discourses. Through increasing personal and professional awareness and encouraged by colleagues and clients, we gain a more critical understanding of the structural (post)colonial inequalities that continue to work within North American popular mainstream culture, undergirded and propped up through culturally prescriptive, strategically embedded colonial discourses that still define, superimpose and privilege the prevailing homogeneous, normative (white, abled, heterosexual, preferably male) North American identity (Greschner, 1998; Mullaly, 2002; Smith, 1990; Wharf & McKenzie, 2004).

Part of the social work mandate is its struggle to recognize and negotiate discursive practices that the Canadian federal government has invested in to legislate ‘appropriate’ gender and race identities as embedded within Canadian (post)colonial patriarchal ideology (Brown & Strega, 2005; Stevenson, 1999). At the heart of this struggle lies the challenge of sorting out (post)colonial meanings of how we are to understand ourselves and each other within a eurocentric nation that, notwithstanding its cultural plurality, is busy devising and upholding
clearly marked boundaries which define a) what First Nations/Aboriginal/Indigenous\textsuperscript{16} means (and white as normative by implication), b) who can be ‘Indian’, and what that means according to the Indian Act (1985), therefore ‘legitimately’; and c) how the Indian Act and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) function in an uneasy and contradictory relationship by determining and prescribing constructed identities and human rights limitations (Lawrence, 2003; Neu & Therrien, 2003). The colonial human rights parameters established through the Indian Act and delineating the identities of specific people and communities within Canada are then framed against a eurocentrically-based, eurocentrically-oriented population that has defined – and continues to define – itself as the dominant culture in very specific, unmistakably privileged normative ways (Eberts, 2006). Through embedding the Indian Act in selective, inconclusively contradictory ways within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), the Canadian federal government effectively locks Aboriginal/First Nations people in contradictory, unequal, oppressive dynamics within the broader ‘normative’ framework of federal legislation (Shewell, 2004). Said’s (1993) analysis of the systemic properties of colonialism as ideological machine administered through carefully packaged discursive legislation and bureaucracy, speaks directly to the history of colonization in Canada:

Neither imperialism nor colonialism is a simple act of accumulation and acquisition. Both are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well

\textsuperscript{16} There is no clear understanding of which term is the most appropriate to use, for a number of reasons a) all terms have been developed under colonial rule and are therefore superimposed and alien to the peoples themselves, b) while the notion of political correctness is necessary in issues of naming because it practices a culture of awareness and acknowledgment of the problematics regarding cultural difference, it is nebulous at best and ignorant/naive at worst – yet for non-Aboriginal persons it is paramount to maintain critical awareness and not get lulled into a sense of collective nonchalance, c) there is no widespread acceptance among Aboriginal peoples themselves as to which term is the most appropriate – all terms are signifiers of colonization. It is helpful to look at how Aboriginal organizations at the national and international level define themselves and urge non-aboriginal people to address them.
as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination; the vocabulary of classic nineteenth-century imperial culture is plentiful with such words and concepts as "inferior," or "subject races," "subordinate peoples," "dependency," "expansion" and "authority" (p. 8).

One of the greatest problematics in the reframing of meaning relates to the inescapability of (post)colonial discourse\(^\text{17}\) as the dominant discourse in Canada and globally, and the challenge that any consideration of 'Indian' identity in postcolonial Canada must take into account its enmeshment in colonial identifications and regulations whose claims to historical Aboriginal identity outside the colonial paradigm remain meaningless and irrelevant (Lawrence, 2003). In other words —were it not for the invention of the Indian Act and other related legislation and policies, the Canadian government would have no tools, no vocabulary to force Aboriginal peoples into the colonial paradigm.

Indeed, to speak of Native identity at all in some ways reinforces the notion that the word 'Indian' describes a natural category of existence. And yet, it is equally clear that the label 'Indian' has been an external descriptor, meaningless to the Indigenous peoples of the Americas prior to colonization. As a common identity it was imposed on indigenous populations when settler governments in North America usurped the right to define Indigenous citizenship, reducing the members of hundreds of extremely different nations, ethnicities and language groups to a common raced identity as 'Indian.' (Lawrence, p. 5)

The continued resistance of Canadian (post)colonial discourses in the areas of legislation, criminal justice, health, economy, social and cultural domains to reframe themselves in the face of increasing globalization and the continued colonization of Indigenous knowledges

\(^{17}\) I use the term colonial discourse, or (post)colonial discourse in the singular form to refer to the overarching meta-discourse of colonialism; I also refer to various specific colonial discourses in the areas of health, social and legal services
constitutes a serious failure in the struggle toward more egalitarian and just societies. For Canadian social work practitioners this offers a particular dilemma as the CASW Code of Ethics (2005) prescribes that “social workers promote social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources, and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs. Social workers oppose prejudice and discrimination against any person or group of persons, on any grounds, and specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups” (p. 5). In order for social workers to reduce barriers, expand choices and challenge discrimination of persons and groups, we must become literate concerning the strategies of formulating discriminatory views into legitimate legal discourse, and we must politicize ourselves to the eurocentricity that exist within notions like ‘identity,’ ‘self’ and ‘self-determination.’ We need to open ourselves up to their cultural, raced and often gendered meanings, and we need to understand them as being carefully selected and regulated to establish and reinforce dominant ideologies. The dilemma we face is this: how do we as social work practitioners challenge injustices that in themselves constitute the predominant legitimated legal/policy discourse and that helps to articulate the very frameworks regulating social work praxis? The Code of Ethics does not address the politics that drive the establishment of ontological and epistemological frames of reference which give us the tools for critical ethical analysis. Mullaly (2002, p. 23) points out that “the current dominant discourse consists of a set of assumptions about the social world that largely reflects the interests of capitalism, patriarchy, and people of European descent.” Furthermore, he suggests that social work textbooks are for the most part written within this discourse and that the knowledge offered in much of social science
literature reinforces the existing social order through privileging ideas that support it and marginalizing scholarship that challenges it.

In this (post)modern year of 2010 we are still reluctant to acknowledge that the Indian Act as a discursive territory of artificial, meaning-boundaries reflects a deeply conflicted, fundamentally destructive ideology whose central concern has always been racist oppression and subjugation/forced assimilation. We are reluctant to acknowledge that it was invented as a doctrine of strategic colonization politics to delineate between Aboriginal/First Nations and caucasian settlers in this country, and to subsequently define this delineation in terms of unequal, oppressive rights and privileges. If through nothing else, non-Aboriginal Canadians cannot easily remain oblivious in the face of unresolved land claims and Aboriginal protests regarding non-Aboriginal resource extraction on Aboriginal lands, and the detrimental environmental impact of this extraction industry on Aboriginal peoples’ ability to, among other things, have access to clean water, intact watersheds and community forests, and abundant, healthy fish and wildlife. Neither can they ignore the fact that there exists a curiously two-tiered system of legislation and policies that regulates Aboriginal/First Nations versus non-Aboriginal identities within this country. Aboriginal/First Nations and non-Aboriginal men and women have documented the never-ending damaging fall-out resulting from the Indian Act’s legislative authority. Organizations such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples (1996) have produced evidence that has been startling to everybody but Aboriginal/First Nations people themselves. According to Henderson (1996),

The Indian Act seems out of step with the bulk of Canadian law. It singles out a segment of society -- largely on the basis of race -- removes much of their land and property from the commercial mainstream and gives the Minister of Indian & Northern Affairs, and
other government officials, a degree of discretion that is not only intrusive but frequently offensive. The Act has been roundly criticized on all sides: many want it abolished because it violates normative standards of equality, and these critics tend to be non-Aboriginal; others want First Nations to be able to make their own decisions as self-governing polities and see the Act as inhibiting that freedom. Even within its provisions, others see unfair treatment as between, for example, Indians who live on reserve and those who reside elsewhere. In short, this is a statute of which few speak well.”

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples (RCAP) report has been used widely as a comprehensive resource document in social justice research and policy papers (often conducted by non-Aboriginal researchers) and has proven in many cases to be a meaningful tool toward challenging politics of discrimination regarding Aboriginal peoples in Canada. It is not well known that the RCAP was established by the Canadian government as another discursive strategy to problematize and slow down the basic issue of colonial history and politics. According to Neu and Therrien (2003) “after Oka, the federal government’s response was, predictably, to strike a Royal Commission, with the result -3500-page document (Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples [RCAP] 1996) –not arriving till five years later. The delay prompted Assembly of First Nations leader Ovide Mercredi to march to the parliament buildings. The Prime Minister refused to see him” (p. 5). This is a historically, politically and socio-culturally significant example of how the power of dominant discourse can, in the case of Oka, not only manufacture a situation of assumed national crisis, but that even in the aftermath of this enormous event it has the power to obfuscate its motives or simply delete them out of the public discourse/consciousness. Dominant discourse then proceeds to demonstrate to Canadians a level of seemingly good cross-cultural intentions that comes as a complete reversal to the blunt
colonial assimilation politics that framed the Oka situation from its beginnings in 1717 (Ney & Therrien, 2003). I think that for social work practitioners to become agents for social change in the context of anti-oppressive praxis, it is vital that we become increasingly literate in the deconstruction of dominant discourses in all arenas of private and public life, certainly in the historical, political, legal, social discourses that regulate our daily lives and strategically reinforce inequalities.

Significant policy research initiatives (Reading, Kmetic & Gideon, 2007; Stout & Kipling, 1998; Stout, Kipling & Stout, 2001; Wilson, 2004) focus on the dynamics of oppression that specifically impact the health/wellbeing of Canadian Aboriginal women (Health Canada, 2000; Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2002) in multiple, embedded ways. At the intersection of gender, health and violence, Aboriginal women are often caught in interlocked cyclicalities of (post)colonial oppressions. According to Mann (2005),

Aboriginal women's vulnerability to violence and sexual assault within their communities is fuelled by social and economic marginalization and a history of colonialist government policies including residential schools, which have disrupted relations between Aboriginal men and women and eroded cultural identity. The dispossession of status Indian women who married outside their communities and the removal of Aboriginal children to be educated in residential schools greatly contributed to the marginalization of Aboriginal women within both their communities and Canadian society. (p. 2)

It is important to note the colonial alliance between the Church and the invention of the Indian Act and its pervasive power dynamics to attack and subsequently regulate the status of Aboriginal women in a gendered process of patriarchal/colonial oppression (Lawrence, 2003; Mann, 2005; McIvor, 2004) in order to undermine the strength and power of Aboriginal societies
in general. At the same time, feminist discourses that are predominantly eurocentric — framed as
discourses of resistance and alternative discourses within western eurocentric patriarchy and
colonialism — often are locked in unresolved relations with Aboriginal/First Nations women’s
claim to relational Aboriginal/First Nations identity and self-determination that lies beyond the
territory of colonial disenfranchisement (Status of Women Canada, 2001). It seems that as long
as western derived and oriented feminist discourses insist on providing the ideological and
discursive foundation for (post)modern feminist discourse, non-eurocentric feminist ways of
building meaning cannot be acknowledged nor can there be a fruitful egalitarian mingling of
cross-cultural voices.

Canadian dominant discourse is more than culturally and racially oppressive. Due to its
inception as a patriarchally-based doctrine of colonization, the Indian Act has prescribed the
oppression of First Nations women as a foundational tenet through specific articles whose
amendments and exemptions in recent decades still continue to perpetuate gender inequality.
as well as Status of Women Canada (1997, 1998, 2001) have worked for many years to critique
existing policies and legislation, offer alternative guidelines that would inform race/gender
politics at the colonially designed intersections of whiteness and race, and ultimately improve the
situation for Aboriginal women and children who are most affected by the Indian Act. Eberts’
(2006) report, after examining equality claims, concludes that regarding the situation and
treatment of Aboriginal women in Canada with respect to International Human Rights and
Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, International Covenant on Civil and
Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the
Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Canada falls far below the standards set by the international community and adopted by Canada for basic human rights protection.

Eberts urges the recognition of the longstanding discrimination against Aboriginal women in Canada, and the role played by government policies, the Indian Act, and various actions of government related to the Indian Act. Status of Women Canada policy research papers echo Ebert’s findings by summing up the interrelated oppressive practices contained within the Indian Act, stating that a) any amendments to the Indian Act to protect individual equality rights of First Nations women is doomed to fail since the Indian Act itself was conceived as gender discriminatory legislation, and b) that any equality rights amendments to the Indian Act must fail because the Act itself is a document that does not recognize collective equality since it was conceived to subjugate an entire peoples. In addition, SWC argues that “just as important, the equality interests of First Nations women, as women, often cannot be easily or coherently separated from First Nations women’s equality interests as members of a racialized group, members of distinct nations, off-reserve residents, mothers or single mothers, to a few” (2001, p. 2).

Furthermore, the gender discrimination contained in the Canadian colonial discourse has pitted First Nations women and First Nations men against each other in different, overlapping context. Many band councils have acculturated themselves to the colonial discourse and through federally imposed governance structures and processes refuse to invite First Nations women to

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19 This refers also to the 1985 amendment to the Act which reinforces assimilation under colonial rule because it extended status to First Nations women and their children but not to the following generations.

20 This excerpt is from a 2001 Status of Women Canada policy research paper titled “Intersectionality of First Nations women’s equality interests” which traces the various interlocked inequalities that First Nations women struggle with, whose roots are located in Canadian colonial legislation.
participate as equal partners. Because of the impossibility of merging traditional First Nations values of gender roles and collective rights with colonial race/gender discrimination and the privileging of men over women, the positions regarding individual and collective rights are extremely polarized between the Assembly of First Nations and the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC), particularly in the context of self-government and the participation of First Nations women in band leadership (SWC, 2001) and governance processes. The 10-year political struggle of the women of Tobique (Silman, 1987) as well as numerous other, ongoing charter cases of individual First Nations women and organizations like NWAC illustrate the pain that women enter into with First Nations men in their own communities when they challenge colonial discourse.

I want to note here that the divisions regarding colonial gender discrimination are a particularly sensitive concern to many Aboriginal women and men in general, and First Nations women and men specifically, and for obvious reasons: in a culture of discrimination, marginalized peoples historically create networks and build on each other’s strengths (Mullaly, 2002); eurocentric gender discrimination against Aboriginal women has caused a great divide between Aboriginal women and men that cannot be easily bridged within the framework of colonial discourse. This situation is exacerbated because women’s roles and identities in Aboriginal value systems and world views have been overall more emancipatory than women’s roles and identities within eurocentric value systems and world views. As it stands, and “despite the 1985 amendments,” there are continuing concerns about the equal status of women under the Indian Act.

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21 For further information see Status of Women Canada website (http://www.swc-cf.gc.ca/pubs/pubspr/) as well as the Native Women’s Association of Canada (http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/documents)
22 Because forced assimilation lies at the heart of Canadian colonizing discourse, understanding its strategies is vital for social workers if we want to challenge systemic oppression as we are urged to do in the CASW Code of Ethics (2005). The following excerpt is Mann’s problematization of Bill C-31 for Aboriginal women. “Arising from Bill C-31, the Indian Act contains two categories of Indian registration. Pursuant to subsection 6(1), a child is registered as
Indian Act. These concerns include residual sex discrimination in the Indian status entitlement provisions, access to band membership, participation in self-government or governance-related measures, such as the development of band membership codes, access to programs and resources controlled by band council government on reserve and division of matrimonial real property on reserve. There is a serious concern among many Aboriginal women that a return to First Nations self-government will standardize existing colonial gender inequality unless it is being addressed by both Aboriginal men and women (Lawrence, 2003). According to Glenna Perley (Silman, 1987), “all those chiefs who were so against reinstatement are going to keep the women off their band lists, because they know those women coming back won’t vote for them. So the chiefs that fought against us are going to keep fighting against us, I’m afraid. It’s important for women to keep working, because the struggle isn’t over yet” (p. 238). It is important to note that part of the insidiousness of colonial discourse is its system of reward and penalty.

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23 “Currently, federal law does not provide spouses living on reserves with legal recourse for obtaining interim exclusive possession of the family home equivalent to that which is available to all spouses living off-reserve. Equally, a regime governing the division between spouses of matrimonial real property on reserves when a marriage ends in separation or divorce continues to be conspicuous by its absence from federal law. Where provincial family laws do apply, lack of enforcement renders them ineffective in protecting the rights of Aboriginal women who face geographic, cultural, and language barriers, to name just a few” (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2005, p. 7)
punishment. Following the 1985 amendment to the Indian Act, the federal government did not increase funding to Aboriginal bands for necessary housing in proportion to the Aboriginal women who after years of having been forced to leave now wanted to return to their bands and their families. At the same time, as part of fiscal restraint policies, federal and provincial governments have not built new housing for off reserve Aboriginal families since 1993. The following excerpt by NWAC (2005) illustrates how gendered inequalities within the colonial discourse create a vicious cycle of interlocking discrimination for many Aboriginal women:

Housing needs of Aboriginal women must respect that violence is a central factor in women’s housing needs. Inuit women who face violence in the home may have a difficult time leaving the relationship, due, in part, to northern remoteness and lack of adequate housing. In the event of marriage dissolution, provincial courts have no jurisdiction to award the female spouse or partner interest in the family home, which is usually in the legal possession of the husband. This often results in women having to leave the reserve and move to urban centers, where they are faced with multiple challenges, such as lack of adequate childcare, lack of long-term shelter, lack of employment, and lack of peer support. (p. 10)

Due to the format of this thesis I am not able to give the thorough consideration to this issue it deserves. My presentation of the impact of Canadian colonial discourse has been simplistic and reductionist. The scope of colonizing strategies and their devastating impact on the relations between Aboriginal women and men is enormous and its significance to social work as a profession (both state-mediated and private) and social work as an academic discipline cannot be overrated if social work is to play a meaningful role in dismantling colonial discourse.
Given the pervasive and overt discrimination against Aboriginal peoples and particularly Aboriginal women in Canada, and given that the social work mandate asks us to challenge all forms of discrimination, it follows that reading, deconstructing and participating in reconstructing the Canadian dominant colonial discourse must be paramount to meaningful social work praxis. Because colonialism works as a system of multiple interconnected oppressive practices, as social work practitioners we need to ensure that we develop a level of consciousness and literacy that enables us to read, analyze and challenge these practices. As mentioned earlier, focussing on only one body of theories like feminist theories which is largely eurocentric-based, runs the risk of interpreting colonial oppression too narrowly because we do not have the vocabulary to recognize and work with different ontological and epistemological knowledge claims. Working from anti-oppressive theories only may leave out finer nuances of gender analysis that feminist theories can provide. The intersectionality of oppression (Mullaly, 2002) needs to be addressed through an intersectionality of justice-seeking, equality-seeking and anti-oppressive practices. Before we get to this point, however, we need to ensure that we understand the many ways in which people, communities, peoples are being oppressed and marginalized. This means that our analysis, if it is to be comprehensive, must situate itself within a frame of reference that does not privilege colonizing eurocentric discourse. This is a challenge since eurocentric discourse is embedded in mainstream Canadian and global culture in most facets of our lived experiences. Developing critical awareness of our own locations becomes particularly important if our identities are also privileged by dominant society (for example, if we have eurocentric ancestry, and/or are caucasian, and/or have situated ourselves within a middle class milieu). As professionals and social work practitioners, we must remember that we are socialized into the dominant culture and that the professionalization of social work is in itself a
contradictory and problematic concept for social work (Mullaly, 2002). Developing a critical consciousness of our privilege is the first step toward challenging colonial discourse. A significant further step toward establishing an alternative frame of reference is by shifting perspectives and creating counter-discourses that challenge and uncover the hegemonies and oppressive practices of the dominant discourse. In the context of (post)colonial Canadian discourse, as social work practitioners we want to build a frame of reference that centers the lives of marginalized and oppressed people in critically meaningful ways.

I have argued in a previous chapter that social work as a praxis is located in the interface between modernism and (post)modernism. This location allows social work’s mandate to work toward absolute concrete goals as a just society that serves the wellbeing of all – its grand modernist narrative – to situate itself within a framework for analysis that decenters and interrupts the narrative as (post)modern meaning-building strategies. Three broad qualifications enable social work to become an effective counter-culture movement, nationally and globally:

1. Social Work’s strong ethical mandates toward a just and egalitarian society form the foundation and driving force in social work in most if not all countries social work is practiced – notwithstanding its often problematic location within a state’s social welfare control (Wharf & McKenzie, 2004).

2. Social work mandates are inclined toward interdisciplinarity – from community capacity building to cross-cultural research collaborations (Brown & Strega, 2005).

3. The (post)modern approach of social work’s is that of transgressive, insightful disruptor of privileged positions and dominant discourses (Fawcett, Featherstone, Fook & Rossiter, 2000).

One challenge social work faces will be to consistently resist becoming absorbed into a dominant politics of managing and controlling people’s social welfare to serve a privileged few. Another
related concern on a larger scale concerns social work’s need for increased reflexive ethical criticality to challenge new global ways of colonizations of people and their knowledges and resources. I am speaking of Indigenous peoples around the world, including Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and the imperative for social work to address the very ontological and epistemological framework that has been the source of a powerful ethical tool like the CASW Code of Ethics. Kreitzer (2003) speaks to this challenge:

As a challenge to social work in Canada, I wonder how many Social Work Codes of Ethics have taken into account and enveloped the values and ethics of First Nations cultures? Is it appropriate to intertwine the different values as the New Zealanders have done or should separate Codes of Ethics govern social work practice and conduct with European social workers and Aboriginal social workers in Canada? Traditional Native Code of Ethics, deemed by the First Nations of Manitoba (Manitoba, 2005) as universal to all nations, reflects a somewhat different approach to values in life than western social work values. There are similarities and differences between this and the CASW Code of Ethics and if these kinds of values were included in the CASW Code of Ethics, possibly a different kind of ethics would emerge. (p. 15)

The CASW Code ethics’ citings of its ethical sources are an important gesture to practice transparency. It is the sources themselves that concern me, and one in particular. I want to speak to the use of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a foundational ethical source for the CASW Code of ethic: is it sufficient for a professional ethical code in the third millenium, and in the context of radically changing globalizing forces, to draw on a Universal Declaration of Human Rights coined in 1948 (CASW Code of Ethics, 2005, p. 4)? Even if this declaration was put forward by the United Nations? The political picture of 1948 was vastly different than it is
now, the Second World War had just ended and the idea of the United Nations was born as a response to superimpose a heightened measure of control on states in order to prevent another war. Membership was narrow and exclusive (The United States exercised disproportionate presence at the UN table) and few nations belonged to it. Indigenous cultures were barely on the United Nations radar screen, and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights reflects this fact in its articulation of eurocentric values and its emphasis on eurocentric social/kinship structures. Above all, it is a gendered document that speaks from the male point of view in all aspects that are significant: throughout its six pages, the male pronoun is used 26 times, the female pronoun not once. ‘Women’ is referred to only twice, never by itself but both times in phrases directly linked to men: the preamble refers to “equal rights of men and women” and article 16 (1) and subsumes the notion of women into the overarching concept of family by stating that “men and women...have the right to marry and to found a family”. The only other time we find women referred to in an oblique, partial way, again subsuming women into the prescribed role of mother, is in article 25 (2) “motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.” Few phrases like ‘human beings’ (used twice), ‘human person’ (once) ‘members of the human family’ (once), and ‘people’ (once) are employed, but these only provide a weak backdrop for the male central agent in endeavouring to establish and cultivate all those rights which are at the core of human rights legislation: ‘his rights,’ ‘his country’, ‘his defence’, ‘his honour’, ‘his privacy’, ‘his nationality’, ‘his family’, ‘his property’, ‘his religion’, ‘his personality’, ‘his dignity’, ‘his interests’, ‘his control’. Children are mentioned twice, not as beings in their own right but in the eurocentric context of state/social control: “All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection” (article 25 (2), and the
control of the private household: “Parents have a prior right to choose the education that shall be given to their children” (article 26 (3).

I want to draw attention to two statements that demonstrate the overwhelming eurocentric androcentrism of the entire document: Article 1: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” And article 27 (2): “Everyone has the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.” The patriarchal collapse of ‘all human beings’ and ‘spirit of brotherhood’ as well as implying that the author of all scientific, literary or artistic production must be a ‘he’ works against any gender and cultural equality claims this declaration is premised to support in the 2005 CASW Code of Ethics. This document underscores the interconnectedness of predominant values that characterize eurocentric colonialism: a presumption of eurocentric socio-cultural structures, the centrality of the (heterosexual) male, and the individualization and notion of private ownership. Indigenous peoples around the world have stated over and over again from time of contact with europeans that their knowledges are collective and that cultural knowledges in all their diverse forms (traditions, rituals, languages, oralities, medicines, arts and others) must be respected in their collectivity. There is no indication in the 1948 declaration of any awareness of this consciousness. As well, mention of the enormously significant roles of women in most Indigenous societies as harvester and transmitter of these sacred knowledges in social and kinship domains remain completely absent in this document.

I think it is vital that we contextualize the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights historically in order to gain further understanding of what it means for a Code of Ethics in 2005 to consider a document such as this: back in 1948, anthropologists were still busy
‘discovering’ and cataloguing Indigenous people in parts of the world, taking their cultural tools, artefacts, and deceased ancestors, and overall operating within a eurocentric world view. Its strategies consisted among others of dividing generations from each other by building residential schools to accelerate enforced assimilation, withholding basic human rights (citizenship), and prohibiting Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples from entering certain public spaces. At the same time this world view enabled the Canadian government to design and enact a separate body of legislation that, for example, served to forcefully move Aboriginal people from their traditional home grounds into small remote reserves, extract millions of dollars worth of resources from their lands and destroy the very bases of their living (Lawrence, 2003; Neu & Therrien, 2003; Qwul’sih’yah’maht Thomas, 2005). The first Canadian province to issue provincial human rights legislation was Ontario in 1962. According to Tang and Sangha (2005), it took until the 1970s for Canadian legislation to enact human rights legislation that would offer some protection from racism:

By 1975, every province had human rights legislation and a human rights commission in place. The federal government enacted the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1977 to cover discrimination (Mendes, 1995). Besides human rights legislation, Canada has passed other types of legislation which signals its commitment to addressing racism. The Multiculturalism Act of 1992 includes provisions that recognize discrimination as a factor in Canadian life and commits the government to addressing barriers in service and employment (Multiculturalism and Citizenship, Canada 1989-90). The Canadian Bill of Rights, introduced in 1960 by Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker, prohibited racial discrimination, but had limited impact because it did not have constitutional status and
did not apply to provincial jurisdictions. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982 finally enshrined the principle that racial discrimination was unconstitutional. (p. 3)

I think that we cannot underestimate the significance of having built a critical nationally-overarching Code of Ethics on a document that reinforces eurocentric and androcentric world views. As proponents of anti-oppressive, feminist social work we need to know why the CASW Code of Ethics maintains its allegiance to archaic documents like the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights whose androcentricity and eurocentrism becomes a barrier to Canadian social work’s moving forward into a new paradigm that informs itself through difference-centered ontologies and epistemologies. In the face of this eurocentric embeddedness it is all the more impressive to witness the 2005 CASW Code of Ethics’ tenacious attempts to work toward a respectful recognition of all people and their human rights (preamble, values 1 & 2). As social work practitioners, a large part of our work involves challenging human rights infractions with our clients, acting as government watchdogs, being engaged in individual counseling, hotlines, public education campaigns, and pursuing the eradication of racism in a multitude of ways. It is vital that the social work profession uses as frames of reference the progressive declarations articulated by those in our society who have experienced the most intense forms of colonization.

Many changes have taken place within a ponderously moving organization like the United Nations, but even there we can adopt more current and insightful documents like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as well as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979 (and entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981 after the twentieth country had ratified it). As well, the United
Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (the Convention or CERD) became legal in 1969. By 2001, 165 countries had ratified this that has proven an effective tool in exposing state violations of the international treaty. Because the Convention lays down standards that are legally binding, state parties are required to implement the treaty domestically and every two years file a report. These reports are looked at, evaluated and state parties are asked to defend their record before the CERD. The final reports are sent to press and also appear on the CERD webpage. Despite recognized problematics like impartiality, CERD still serves as a useful tool for social workers in both local and global spheres by impressing public accountability on local and national human rights violations. (It should be noted that the 1985 Indian Act amendment to redress First Nations women’s loss of status upon marrying non-First Nations men finally took place because the Tobique women took the case (Sandra Lovelace vs. Canada) to the United Nations.)

In the face of increased globalization and national cultural pluralism, it is increasingly becoming clear that ethical frameworks like the CASW Code of Ethics need to be reassessed consistently to ensure the cross-cultural sensitivity of their ontological/epistemic knowledges. As Kreitzer suggests: “If social work values are the principles by which the profession writes its professional codes of ethics and instrumental social work values worldwide differ according to culture then acceptance and use of western codes of ethics by non-western countries needs to be urgently addressed” (p. 13). As one example of decentering eurocentrism and creating more cross-culturally inclusive, sensitive ethics, I want to refer to the Wholistic Policy and Planning Model developed by the Assembly of First Nations which is based on the medicine wheel and outlines its spiritual, physical, mental, emotional and cultural, economic, social domains. In addition, the significance of relationship inside, between and outside community is defined as
bonding, bridging and linkages. The model reflects key issues of community at its core, components of the medicine wheel, the four cycles of the lifespan (child, youth, adult, elder), the four key dimensions of First Nations self-government (self-government/jurisdiction, fiscal relationships/accountability, collective and individual rights, capacity/negotiations), social determinants of health, and the three components of social capital (bonding, bridging, and linkage).
Figure 2. First Nations Wholistic Policy and Planning Model (Reading, Kmetic & Gideon, 2007, p. 30)
acknowledged or not
it has taken me many years
to step forward & keep my spirit
alive or just so
is it too much to ask to want to become alive
to want to become?
here
I find myself
my children still fast asleep
sitting at 5 a.m. on July 8, 2009
in a small weathered cabin
at the slanted edge of my consciousness
barely announcable even to my self
& this feeling stuns me
this hilarious feeling that things
are so much more enormous than they seem
so exponentially raw
hurting
everyone on some level
at the same time
also astonishingly
straightforward
changeable maybe
& yet
& yet smiling inside tears continues
Within the cyclical continuum of socio-cultural and gender injustices, to work from my inside out, I need to deeply prod my own conflicted, uneasy psyche. Which I can barely bring myself to do because – I would need to scratch away at scabs, reopen deep, raw wounds, challenge my preciously soldered sense of becoming-into-my-own- hallelujah that has taken so many eons, so many disappeared, tortured, raped, deleted children and women everywhere to suffer through, grieve over and heal with. Only to remain disoriented and unconsoled.
that’s what it would mean
of course little can heal yet
mostly it festers into orderly inquiries
rare rituals spiralling out of control
systemic agonies of how to compromise, negate, adjust, adapt, smilingly,
like we all do & all the time even when we make love
even when we slowly die from it
this healing has barely begun and what do we call it?

(Maria Walther, winter 2009)
deeper than bone talk

no respite from this terrible longing to be
what you know is more true
for more of us
what is no more than
fair & just no more
& no less than to be you fully

why
in this devolving world of
postmodern posthuman
are we pushed so hard for
a modernist understanding of unequal,
disempowering meanings
who in this untender world do we expect to award us

This fear that we have nurtured and built into a transcultural hegemony of institutionalized power relations, unrecognizable even to most women and men, except where it hurts deep inside us where we feel the knowing.

who are we
why do so many of us
women & men
remain behind complicit in colonizing all that’s someone’s true & deep & loving

who are we
why are small children & babies raped

who are we
still we won’t say
what the real issue is
could it be fear
could it be fear

(Maria Walther, winter 2009)
speak words new words to enter living

unprovoked
unhassled I observe her disappear
r recede into the familiar groves & caverns
the venerable globalizing language-scape of
self-referencing words & structures designing
generations of cultural myths
logocentrism that so beautifully arranges
women’s lessness
that lives to document no woman as self-contained equal

whose ancient anger & love we unleashed to
decode-recode the terrifying bonds that
shape our multiple complicities
with/in each other
within the misogynist mainstream brokering

where lying in the foetal position defines survival
& precise elegant words
betray the careful logic of superiority
isolate her from her wants
her loves

who wants to question the original spark of resistance
almost where we could begin to conceive of
building meaning organizing words in declared alternatives
of transparent worth like
mutual
akin
central

notwithstanding these promises that we knew to be
reciprocal coherences we fervently believed in
celebrated since
I feel this much is true:

my mother travelled far within her realm
she reached new words & owned them sparkling
they satisfied her
her colour returned

until she was felled against the old age fear of loneliness
& looking in from some outside she barely saw her self
the realm she thought she knew
enveloped & swallowed her
her self’s essential oils that frothed
passionately alive & crazy

by all accounts she disappeared
into a second marriage
second husband
cancer catholicism
in that precise dis/connected order

her life
this architectural carnival
spontaneously framed & furnished through all of us who
gesture love to her in so many ways
her life now houses her

a broken mouth
out of the right to speak a language we own

(Maria Walther, winter 2009)
Chapter Five: Social work's (post)colonial challenges – Aboriginal/Indigenous women and the environment

Colonization is an age-old process of theft and control facilitated by doctrines of conquest such as the Manifest Destiny and Terra Nullius, that claim the land as empty (except for the millions of aboriginals living there), and non-productive (in its natural state). And as the self-proclaimed "discoverers" of crops, medicinal plants, genetic resources, and traditional knowledge, these bioprospectors become the new "owners". Intellectual property rights are being used to turn nature and life processes into private property. As private property, it is alienable; that is, it can be owned, bought and sold as a commodity. The result is a legitimized process for thievery, which we call "biocolonialism". (Harry, 2001, p. 1)

The Beijing Draft Platform for Action, unfortunately, is not critical at all of the New World Order. It does present a comprehensive list of issues confronting women and an even longer list of actions which governments, the UN and its agencies, multilateral financing institutions, and NGO's should do. It identifies the persistent and increasing burden of poverty as the number one critical concern... It also acknowledged that in the past decade the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately to the number of men. However, it does not acknowledge that this poverty is caused by the same powerful nations and interests who have colonized us and are continuing to recolonize, homogenize, and impose their economic growth development model and monocultures on us. It does not present a coherent analysis of why is it that the goals of "equality, development, and peace," becomes [sic] more elusive to women each day in spite of three UN conferences on women since 1975. While it refers to structural adjustment programs (SAP), it only talks about mitigating its negative impacts, not questioning the basic framework undergirding SAPs. It even underscores the importance of trade liberalization and access to open and dynamic markets, which to us, pose the biggest threat to our rights to our territories, resources, intellectual and cultural heritage. (Beijing Declaration of Indigenous Women, 1995, articles 10, 11)

A vision for improving health involves partnership among First Nations communities to investigate the spectrum of local and world health issues that move beyond geo-political boundaries to involve governments, NGOs and the special interests of First Nations peoples, many of whom live in extreme poverty due to the historic and present day socio-economic forces of colonization and globalization. Such a vision must go beyond epidemiological description of public health outcomes to a view that celebrates their unique economic, political and social factors, ultimately providing solutions to the pressing need for First Nations peoples to achieve a level of health and well-being that is free from discrimination. (Reading, Kmetic & Gideon, 2007, p. 7)

24 This excerpt is taken from a presentation titled “Biopiracy and Globalization: Indigenous Peoples Face a New Wave of Colonialism” given by Debra Harris, Executive Director of the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism at the International Forum on Globalization;

25 This excerpt is taken from the “First Nations Wholistic Policy and Planning Model” which was presented to the World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health;
In the previous chapter I explored aspects of Canadian (post)colonialism as a site of Aboriginal peoples' ongoing social, cultural and gender struggles prescribed through oppressive discursive practices such as the Indian Act, and played out against their specific material, lived conditions. I have begun to explore how (post)colonial discourse as the dominant discourse of Canadian mainstream society through –by implication –the 1982 Canadian Human Rights Charter –positions non-Aboriginal people, specifically caucasian people, in ways that establishes and maintains ‘white privilege’. I also explored how the CASW Code of Ethics (2005) situates itself as a prescriptive historical socio-cultural document in relation to these struggles as well as some of the implications regarding the role of social work in challenging Canadian (post)colonial discourse. I want to emphasize that my inquiry is not exhaustive and that there are many more levels of analysis that must be examined.

In this chapter I situate the intersectional analysis at the juncture of specific human-centred social categories such as gender, race, ethnicity, indigeneity and the category of the natural26 or nonhuman environment. I will explore some of the challenges that social work faces at this juncture. The nonhuman environment is crucial to discussions regarding social, cultural and gender justice for several interrelated reasons: people’s lived experiences are bound up in the physical reality of this planet, that is, our physiological, material lives depend on earth’s continued availability as source of energy and matter; the very fact that our social lives end with our physiological lives encapsulates our dependence on this planet (Mellor, 1997). As well, the

26 The term ‘natural’ is highly problematic in western theorizing and western lived experience both as a concrete material condition as well as an abstract concept it is used to uphold dualistic categories of culture and nature, which are then compared/contrasted usually in opposition and conflict with each other. There is no agreement on the criteria for ‘natural’ nor on the meaning of ‘nature’ yet interpretations of what constitutes ‘nature’ and the ‘natural’ have been central to the use and colonizing mechanisms of european and eurocentric ideologies. More recently, feminist and Indigenous analyses have highlighted the problematics of essentializing women and nature toward further global capitalist exploitation of both (Smith, 2001, Sturgeon, 1997). For the purpose of this paper, I will attempt to use other qualifiers as appropriate, i.e. nonhuman environment, physical landscape, public goods (soil, air, water), ecosystems, biosphere, and others.
nonhuman environment in its core materiality and subjectivity lies outside human ways of knowing, outside human ontology (Warren, 2000). Consequently, “the creation of social space out of the biological/ecological conditions is always problematic” (Mellor, 1997, p. 153), or, in other words, any re/presentation of nonhuman life and reality will always be experienced through conflicted human interpretive, discursive formations. The contextualization of these realities within eurocentric ideologies and the resulting societal/cultural behaviours have created many of the challenges we face today regarding the health of this planet and the move toward globally just and sustainable living practices. Social work in its many tendrils of political, social, cultural research, activism, education and awareness work, occupies a central role in this challenge that defines itself at local, national and international levels.

Colonizing nations did not set out as their primary objective to oppress and marginalize Indigenous peoples as much as they operated out of imperialist greed to find new and greater resources to satisfy the insatiable, socio-culturally constructed hunger of its consumers back home, primarily for land settlement and resource extraction (Minh-ha T, 1989; Neu & Therrien, 2003). Tuhiwai Smith (2001) suggests that the two terms – colonization and imperialism – are interconnected and can be used interchangeably because they serve the same purpose, each reinforcing the other in the goal to procure more wealth at minimal/no cost to one’s own cultures(s). Understanding colonization and imperialism as a politics of european and later eurocentric greed will, I think, better enable us to follow its pathways into the current neo-colonial discourse of corporate globalization. Furthermore, opening up some of the discursive strategies of colonization that severed Indigenous peoples’ relationships to their lands –

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*I hesitate to describe european imperialist, colonizing societies as diverse cultures since it has been precisely the overriding homogeneous value system/ideology that pushed eurocentric colonization, for the purpose of this paper, I deliberately choose to highlight the diversity of Indigenous peoples and cultures against the homogeneity of eurocentrism as a globalizing force.*
relationships which provided the topography of their cultural knowledges, including their
dual/social identities, will reframe our awareness regarding Indigenous peoples’ efforts
toward self-government and cultural self-determination. I want to note that as a non-Indigenous
person and social worker, I need to acknowledge my limited partial understanding at all times
and appreciate that my insights can never encompass the totality of Indigenous peoples’
challenges, within Canada and globally, neither the historical dimensions nor the present impact
of multiple oppressions. I also want to acknowledge, and make a very emphatic point, that
Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples around the world have challenged systemic inequalities from the
very beginnings of colonization, launched individual and collective resistance strategies in
efforts to re-establish and protect cultural ownership over traditions, rituals, arts, languages,
definitions of self/collectivity, governance structures/processes, land and resources (Keeshig-
of Canada, 2006; Shewell, 2004; T. Smith, 2001). Within Canada many Aboriginal initiatives are
addressing these issues at provincial and federal levels – we only have to look at the many local
bands and First Nations throughout Canada who continuously challenge invasions by
trans/national companies intent on extracting resources from their lands as well as challenge the
government in claims toward self-governments and to honour treaty rights regarding land claim
settlements.

Eurocentric colonization has globalized the entire planet to the brink of survival for
humans and many forms of life, and at this time we all need to reflect on our collusion in
oppressive practices that continue to colonize Indigenous peoples and their lands in order to
extract resources – as human slave labour and nonhuman riches to support a small percent of the
earth's population in a life style of overconsumption, destruction and wastefulness. In order to help conceptualize the scope of the cultural predicament I consider Bishop's reminder that

[Understanding one's own position as an oppressor, without being completely immobilized, also requires a balance between understanding oneself as an individual and as part of a collective reality. This balance is rare in the culture we live in. Modern western thinking is extremely individualistic. Our ties to the land, our own history, community and culture have been severed. With so little understanding of ourselves as part of a collective entity, it becomes very difficult to figure out our own responsibility for patterns larger than ourselves. (p. 96)

Bishop's quote highlights three interrelated challenges that eurocentrically driven societies face including social work praxis. These challenges reinforce each other as enmeshed ideological conditions at the core of eurocentric, globalizing discourse: our growing alienation from the land that sustains us, our socialization of ourselves as self-contained individuals and our corresponding inability to understand ourselves to each other and the world around us as relational beings, and thirdly, the resulting individual and therefore 'collective' paralysis that immobilizes us because living as most of us do in units of one or carefully prescribed, enforced state-legislated units of 'legitimate' families, we are unable to look much beyond the horizon of our small self-cells. Reconsidering these conditions and understanding how their implications of the carefully cultivated values of individualization, privatization, commodification and exploitation continue to maintain and shape globalizing discourse is one of the primary deconstructive sites for social work practitioners, and anyone engaged in (positive) social change activism. Being a social worker who is non-Aboriginal I continuously need to self-reflexively

28 I am referring to the concept of the nuclear family structure that is a eurocentric invention and has provided the patriarchal framework of how people are being socialized and controlled through state legislation, this framework has become an essential strategy in colonizing Indigenous peoples.
clarify for myself how my eurocentric conditioning has shaped my notion of self-hood and the ontological/epistemic paradigm I have learned to inhabit regarding my subject position and my conceptualization of identity and relationality. Through critically disrupting and decentering dominant eurocentric discourse by privileging traditionally otherized, marginalized, oppressed and difference-centered knowledges I learn to re/frame, re/construct and re/interpret my understanding of social reality and ‘truth’ as cultural variable. The possibility of creating personal and collective agency lies at the centre of this re/learning process (Fawcett, 2000; Parton, 2002).

Within the Canadian socio-cultural and environmental landscape, the Indian Act has been the primary colonizing instrument to implement and regulate the strategic meshwork of eurocentric colonization. Alienating Aboriginal peoples from their lands was only the first step. Through a series of cunning manoeuvres that changed over time according to need, administrative strategies gave government bureaucrats control over Indigenous land sale – Indigenous peoples were prohibited to sell lands to anyone other than the government –which gave the government control over such things as timber extraction rates, exploration and mining rights, and what percentage of the proceeds would be returned to the peoples. In essence, “this financial control allowed government bureaucrats to attempt to balance both settlement policy objectives and the containment/control of Indigenous peoples” (Neu & Therrien, 2003, p. 83). In fact, the history of colonization in Canada and all parts of the world has been a history of subjugating, assimilating, and if necessary, erasing Indigenous peoples to gain control of the land and what it holds. The International Indian Treaty Council (IITC, 2008) held in Guatemala and its “Resolution on the Protection of the Environment and biodiversity: Climate Change, Mining, Oil, Water and Natural Resources” highlights this reality in three issues: it bears out the acute
political agency of Indigenous peoples in articulating and challenging (post)colonial greed; secondly, it illustrates the colossal impact of colonizing attacks on Indigenous peoples’, and thirdly it affirms to non-Indigenous people the deep unreserved relationship Indigenous peoples have always had to their lands:

*Considering* that Indigenous Peoples have a unique, sacred and interconnected relationship with the land, water, air, plants and animals; and *Considering* that oil drilling, mining, deforestation, nuclear power, large scale hydroelectric dams and other forms of non-sustainable energy development deprive Indigenous Peoples of our lands, waters, air, and health, contaminate and deplete our traditional food sources, and are a direct cause of the climate change crisis affecting our ecosystems and ways of life; and *Considering* the wide spread use of agrochemicals including pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers on Indigenous Peoples and lands without their free, prior and informed consent; and *Considering* that global climate change is causing irreparable harm to traditional foods, all forms of marine and land wildlife, natural ecosystems, and spiritual and ceremonial practices, and is the direct cause of environmental disasters which are increasing in severity around the world; and *Considering* the IITC’s firm commitment to fight for a healthy life for all Peoples, and to work for the protection of the environment and the sacred natural world, the IITC resolves the following: **The IITC reaffirms its** support for all resolutions adopted at previous IITC Conferences for the protection of Mother Earth, the natural environment and biological diversity.

It is worth noting that the 2008 IITC was the 34th annual conference held to challenge systemic inequalities and the impact of (post)colonial globalization. Dominant, that is, mainstream media discourse at the national and global levels, predictably has never shown great interest in reframing itself and accommodating experiences, realities and truths of those who are being
marginalized and colonized\textsuperscript{29}. As a consequence, dominant eurocentric discourse continues to resist voices from the margins regardless of the severity of its colonizing impact.

Situated at the intersectional nexus of (post)colonial globalization, Indigenous peoples and their lands, are Indigenous women\textsuperscript{30}. Whereas gender inequality impacts all women to varying degrees often in multiple ways, oppressions of gender, race, ethnicity, indigeneity intersect in multiply compounding ways in the lives of Aboriginal/Indigenous women, visible minority women and women of colour. According to Brodie and Bakker (2007), data capturing poverty as one of the most concretely definable variables for marginalized populations illustrates the situation for Aboriginal women and visible minority women in Canada: “[G]ender disaggregated data, however, masks the fact that, while poverty is gendered across virtually all social categories, women’s poverty tends to be concentrated in identifiable groups. According to 2001 Census data on before-tax income, fully 36 percent of Aboriginal women lived in poverty

\textsuperscript{29} The enormously instrumental role of mainstream media cannot be overrated. Evans (2002) writes that “it is not so much the ownership of the cameras as ownership of the overarching media system that matters. At the heart of the difference is the locus of control. If full control — not only for video creation but also for dissemination and broadcast — lies in indigenous hands, then new and culturally grounded perspectives can result. But if the cameras are available while the training, budget, editorial decision-making, etc. are left in outside hands, then it is essentially impossible to produce materials that lack a reflection of the dominant society that remains in control. While an organization is small, it can operate with a certain degree of autonomy. When it grows large enough to require valuable resources, however, hegemonic pressures kick in more fully, and the degree of resistance manifested by an organization depends on its political perspective, its resources and its history [B] by the very act of offering funding and support for ethnic broadcasting, the government defines precise objectives and criteria for ethnically suitable projects that will receive funding, those objectives and criteria narrow the range of projects that receive serious consideration at any level” (Hegemony and discourse Negotiating cultural relationships through media production, 2002, p. 324)

\textsuperscript{30} Children are the most vulnerable in any human population and I do not want to deflect this reality; however, I also do not want to obscure the reality that it is women who still predominantly carry the responsibility of caring for children and are therefore chiefly impacted at the intersections of oppressions. According to Brodie and Bakker in a study regarding the disappearance of gender as a frame of analysis (2007) “[T]he goal of eliminating child poverty in Canada was both overdue and necessary but, in many ways, the elevation of the abstract “poor child” as the focus of social policy reform incorrectly specified the policy problem. As poverty groups have underlined time and again, the feminization of poverty is a root cause of child poverty, but the gendered structures of inequality in Canada’s labour markets and in society do not enter into a child-centred policy frame (Dobrowolsky and Jenson 2004: 174) Rather, this politics of naming effectively set up an opposition between the child and other disadvantaged groups — as a dichotomy between the deserving and undeserving poor as well as between child and parent. Moreover, these policy discourses depict the poor child as a homogeneous category, veiling considerations of how all children are themselves differently configured by, among other things, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and national origin” (p 43)
(compared to 17 percent of non-Aboriginal women) as do 29 percent of visible minority women, 35 percent of recent women immigrants (arriving between 1991 and 2000), and 26 percent of women with disabilities” (p. 20). This is significant when we consider that during the past 15 years, gender as a category of analysis has come dangerously close to being phased out in the context of federal policy-making and legislation:

This reorganization contradicted a central recommendation of the Beijing Platform for Action that the federal government was preparing to endorse. Paragraph 201 recommends as a best practice that national gender units be located at the highest possible level in federal systems and that these units have access to the forums where the federal division of powers is negotiated (Sawyer 2006). In Canada, these locations are unequivocally the executive offices of the prime minister and the premiers, and a seat in the inner cabinet of the governing party. During these same years, Status of Women Canada was progressively downsized and shifted to the margins of the social policy field, most recently being housed under the umbrella of Canadian Heritage. Gendered identity, it would appear, is now coded as just one of many identities that make up the Canadian multicultural mosaic, rather than as a fundamental structuring principle informing the daily lives of Canadians and a critical component of citizenship equality. These many changes in the organization of Canada’s policy machinery coincided with Canada signing on to the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and the federal government’s enthusiastic endorsement of gender mainstreaming and gender-based analysis in its Federal Plan for Gender Equality, released the following year. (Brodie & Bakker, 2007, p. 36)

The exponential compounding of oppression Aboriginal/Indigenous women experience at the intersections of gender, race, ethnicity and indigeneity carries enormous significance for
social work as anti-oppressive practice and further conceptualizations of social work’s potential in this (post)colonial globalizing force field. In view of these systemic oppressions, the CASW Code of Ethics (2005) is very clear on social workers’ mandate to “respect the unique worth and inherent dignity of all people and uphold human rights” (value 1, p. 4). This value is social work’s gateway to re/evaluating its commitment to eradicate all forms of oppression and open radical possibilities toward global ethics. Kreitzer (2006) suggests that the universality of social work knowledge needs to be assessed and context-specific knowledges developed before we can even think of universal social work ethics. Furthermore, she wonders whether the concept of universalism is a eurocentric concept and therefore already a questionable idea in the context of anti-oppression. I agree that we continuously need to examine the validity of concepts like ‘universalism’ and ‘global ethics’. As it is, however, eurocentrically created oppressions have constituted an ongoing history of globalizing colonization of peoples, lands and resources that can perhaps only be challenged through the coordinated collaboration of universally-oriented global ethics. Social work as a domain that defines itself on all levels – personal, cultural and structural – as challenging discrimination and oppression and supporting people’s potential and dignity (Adams, Dominelli & Payne, 2002; Mullaly, 2002; Pease & Fook) locates itself at the core of a globally concerted challenge. I think that Kreitzer’s critique is valid, and maybe we need to distinguish the notion of universality from the idea of totalization of values. Establishing the existence of universal values as a grounding framework for globally shared social work ethics offers great potential, but it certainly does not preclude the cultivation of local, context-specific, culturally-bound knowledges and ethics. On the contrary, the advent of globalization has restructured local, regional and national economies in different ways and brought increased uncertainties and risks for regions and local communities (Bhavnani, Foran & Kurian, 2003;
Jaffe & Gertler, 2008; Kurian & Munshi, 2003). They stem from the transformation of the state’s role (in particular its reduction in welfare function), international trade agreements which allow for a new international division of labour and the resulting control over the production for global markets by few transnational corporations, increased rates of change (technologies, markets, policies), rising exposure to international currency and commodity market fluctuations and corresponding monetary system insecurity, biotechnical, global-scale experimentation and the information and communications technology (ICT). These developments have forced changes onto place-based communities, particularly in developing countries which cannot be underestimated. Jaffe and Gertler (2008) contend that ICT transmitted information often is not appropriate to specific places, conditions and communities, and may reduce local cultural diversity which results in people losing the skills and capacity to solve problems in context-specific, optimal ways. As a result of the ‘new economy’ of globalization, they write,

the continuity of the intergenerational transfer of culture, and of orientations to community and production, can be ruptured by the dominance of new channels of communications and new cultural influences, and through increased rates of change combined with pressures for income generation....Communities of place are the least stable, and most vulnerable to economic and social disruption. They may become communities in name only –individualized, privatized, depressed, more conflict-ridden, and marginalizing rather than integrating minorities. (p. 15)

It is clear how important and vital the roles of localized/localizing knowledges and ethical behaviours become in the face of rapid globalization and at the intersections of people, culture and the nonhuman environment, as local social networks and communities of place provide a form of social insurance and are critical sites for the reproduction and mobilization of
social capital: place-based communities play central roles in the long-term management of natural resources since many conservation initiatives require coordinated, collective action. In addition, local communities are the locations that will support and maintain long-term management plans. Not only do they constitute the institutional memory with respect to the history of the resources and their extraction, the people living in these communities are the ones who will have to live with the decisions that affect their health and wellbeing, the continued prosperity of their communities and the health of the ecosystem they live in and are sustained by (Jaffe & Gertler, 2008). Kreitzer (2006) urges social work professionals to consider the relevance of ethical codes to the countries they are practiced in: “With social work values as the building block for ethical practice it is important that each country revise their Code of Ethics in order to reflect the language, spirituality, philosophical and historical background of their country. To keep adapting from the western practices and values is not the most indigenous way of providing good social work ethical practice” (p. 17). At the same time, she suggests that “the debate concerning the universality of social work values is useful in educating social workers as to different ways of knowing and thinking that will promote a more equal collaboration and partnership with different social work groups around the world” (p. 17). Listening to the affirmations of Indigenous women who join with Indigenous men in affirming their earth-connected and earth-specific ways of knowing makes it very clear just how enormous the divide is between earth-alienated eurocentric globalizing values, ethics and worldviews, and the more earth-specific, long-term intergenerationally-oriented values of Indigenous peoples around the world. Consider the Manukan Declaration (2004) in which the women of the Indigenous Women’s Biodiversity Network affirm that

31 Like many Indigenous organizations at national and international levels, the Indigenous Women’s Biodiversity Network met in February, 2004 in Sabah, Malaysia, to declare Indigenous women’s inherently connected
We, Indigenous women, secure the health of our Peoples and our environment. We maintain a reciprocal relationship with Mother Earth because she sustains our lives. Indigenous Peoples have developed our own health systems, and Indigenous women are the fundamental conservers of the diversity of medicinal plants, used since the time of our conception....Indigenous women are the guardians of knowledge, wisdom and experience in relation to environment. We have an integral role in the transmission of this knowledge, wisdom and experience to the younger generation” (p. 2.)

The Implications for social work to re/conceptualize our frame of references for social work ethics and praxis have never been more challenging than now when a globalizing ideology of unlimited privatization, commodification and exploitation is threatening the continued survival of the human species and the sustainability of the planet itself. However, the broad domain of social work is still caught in the narrow, defective interpretation of the person-in-environment theories (Coates, 2003). These theories cultivate an approach that fails to take into account the web of planetary interdependence we live in and the responsibility we have, not only as private citizens but as social work practitioners, of participating in establishing the respectful justice throughout all facets of this interdependence, the socio-economic, gender, cultural, and ecological. The following figure illustrates Indigenous peoples’ deep awareness of the interdependence of the human-nonhuman environment and consequently, how differently they conceive person(s)-in-environment theories. I want to draw particular attention to the centre which reiterates the Indigenous Women’s Biodiversity Network’s affirmation of Indigenous women as the guardians and transmitters of traditional knowledges, specifically in relation to the environment.
The Anchorage Declaration affirmed at the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change, Anchorage, (2009), states:

From 20-24 April, 2009, Indigenous representatives from the Arctic, North America, Asia, Pacific, Latin America, Africa, Caribbean and Russia met in Anchorage, Alaska for the Indigenous Peoples’ Global Summit on Climate Change. We thank the Ahtna and the Dena’ina Athabascan Peoples in whose lands we gathered. We express our solidarity as Indigenous Peoples living in areas that are the most vulnerable to the impacts and root causes of climate change. We reaffirm the unbreakable and sacred connection between land, air, water, oceans,
forests, sea ice, plants, animals and our human communities as the material and spiritual basis for our existence....Through our knowledge, spirituality, sciences, practices, experiences and relationships with our traditional lands, territories, waters, air, forests, oceans, sea ice, other natural resources and all life, Indigenous Peoples have a vital role in defending and healing Mother Earth. The future of Indigenous Peoples lies in the wisdom of our elders, the restoration of the sacred position of women, the youth of today and in the generations of tomorrow. We uphold that the inherent and fundamental human rights and status of Indigenous Peoples, affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), must be fully recognized and respected in all decision-making processes and activities related to climate change. (p. 1)

According to Coates (2003), “[T]he bias of social work’s emphasis on ‘person-in-environment’ is confirmed by the attention devoted to the social environment in texts and the codes of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW). As a result, attention to environment has almost exclusively been directed toward the social environment and its relationship to personal troubles. Attention to human relationships with the larger, natural environment has not entered the mainstream of social work thought and practice” (p. 44). He agrees that while radical, feminist and structural critiques have highlighted the diversity and interconnections of root causes of oppression (gender, race, class and others), their critiques have centered on the social environment and have not included the cyclical cause and effect of eurocentric, capitalist ideologies on the nonhuman environment and its impact on the social construction and maintenance of multiple oppressions. I suggest that this is the core challenge social work faces at the beginning of this millennium: to explode the foundations of its social paradigm and revision
its mandate based on the interrelatedness of the human and nonhuman environments. I want to point out here that this differentiation is highly problematic and contradictory since, notwithstanding our social definitions of life, we are embedded within the nonhuman environment, its geological, geographical, ecological, climatic terrains which frame and sustain our lives. This framing of humanity as defined through social terrains and detached from ‘nature’ is, I think, social work’s modernist legacy and thus its challenge.

I have attempted earlier to conceptualize the location of social work in the context of modernity and (post)modernity. If social work is to play an instrumental role in re/visioning and shaping a global ethics toward a hopeful, egalitarian future, it needs to reconceptualize its modern-(post)modern identity into critical agency: it needs to recognize and operate out of a self-reflexive recognition of its inherent modernist belief in the grand narrative of respectful justice for all, and the (post)modern disruptive, deconstructing strategies to get there. Coates (2003) suggests that “[M]odernity’s focus has so centred on individual (whether state or personal) benefit and survival in a highly competitive world that commitment and connectedness has been given little importance in everyday life....The resulting lack of care and concern, an emotional numbness for the less advantaged, is similar to the widespread indifference of the human community toward the eradication of species and habitats. This indifference reflects a lack of connectedness which permeates our world” (p. 6). I would say rather that modernity’s focus has been on conceptualizations and structuring of privilege of certain groups of individuals over others through imperialist and colonizing processes. I also think that the detachment and indifference toward less privileged people and the nonhuman environment which seem to be a result of these processes, are an intrinsic part of the globalizing mechanisms that drive (post)colonial globalization. We cannot buy into this ideology unless we believe in it, and at the
core of this belief—to a greater and lesser degree—lies our conviction of the righteousness of this ideology, its virtually uncontested ‘superiority’ and inevitability in the context of the global human journey.

These components of eurocentric globalizing beliefs are rooted to a large degree in its religious underpinnings of Judeo/Christianity \(^{32}\) which has been an integral part of the system of colonizing strategies around the world. It has operated—and continues to do so—formerly through physical force, now through strategies of rewards-punishment to ‘civilize’ and therefore ‘save’, and has been responsible for physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally removing Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples from their cultural and traditional knowledges, within themselves, with each other and with the land that sustains their culture and lives (Neu & Therrien, 2003; Weaver, 2008). While there is a burgeoning interest in social work to explore world religions as valuable ways of knowing and being, and more specifically, to integrate notions of spirituality into social work praxis (Baskin, 2002; Brenner, 2006; Canda, 2002; Coholic, 2002, 2003; Clews, 2004; Hodge, 2006; Kruk, 2006, Nash & Stewart, 2005, Zapf, 2006), there is a marked reluctance in social work literature to critically examine Christianity as the eurocentric religious discourse in establishing notions of the ‘civilized’ versus the ‘savage’ or ‘heathen’, as well as its intense fundamentalism, its religious conceit and innovative, relentless missionizing, its belief in the notion of charity \(^{33}\), its collusion in subjugating and colonizing peoples and their land, and its integral conviction in the inferiority of women throughout the world. There is more need in social work than ever before to self-critically examine its own

\(^{32}\) Christianity is used as an umbrella term for the myriad of catholic and protestant movements and sects, to denote the commonalities of their basic religious thrust; I want to differentiate here between two Christian movements that were (and continue to be) the primary forces of religious colonization: catholicism which paved the way in its gendered, raced colonization of people, and modern day Christian protestantism and its cultivation of the protestant work ethic and righteous accumulation of material riches and consumptivism that operates as part of the capitalistic, unlimited-economic-growth ideology of eurocentric globalization

\(^{33}\) I am referring here to the notion of charity as a state and religion-mediated strategy of maintaining and reinforcing oppressive conditions, i.e. poverty
eurocentric/european and the notion of Christianity as a synergistic force within the globalizing scope of eurocentric colonization (Weaver, 2008). Derezotes et al. (2008) contend that

[1]n fact, today more people self-identify as religious than ever before in history; part of this wave involves an increase in fundamentalism; which has occurred in all the major global religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Sikhism (Armstrong, 2001)....This resurgence of religion is a social work issue because the continued growth of such interrelated global survival threats as nuclear war, mass casualty terror, climate change, overpopulation, and destruction of natural resources have all been associated by many experts with the current religious resurgence and accompanying tension between fundamentalists of various faiths (e.g., Kazen, 2008; Orsi, 2007; Philpott, 2007; Armstrong, 2006) (p. 6).

In his discussion on spiritual diversity and traditions, Besthorn (2002) mentions Christianity by referring to Lynn White (1973) as saying that modern western alienation from nature is largely related to the early Judeo-Christian theology of despotic human control over the natural world....White’s analysis also explicitly connects the rise of modernism and its neo-liberal, techno-scientific enterprise as in large measure a logical result of Judeo/Christian insolence toward the natural world. The predisposition to desacralized nature laid the foundation for the rise of the Cartesian-Newtonian paradigm and the resulting technological manipulation and domination of nature. White notes that the distinctively western version of progress, technological control, the priority of economistic ontology, resource depleting consumptivism and especially its heavy reliance on scientific description and prediction are permeated with a
religious vernacular that justifies human arrogance toward and dominance over wild nature. (p. 2).

A self-critical consciousness regarding the historical impact of Christianity as a colonizing mechanism and discourse is, I think, vital to social work’s liberation from limiting modernist assumptions of religious impartiality and its own potential regarding social praxis as a space of emancipatory dialogues, strategies of anti-oppression and the cultivation of awareness regarding religions and spiritualities.
aquifers rising

into early sun rays / the bright rush of tension flattens out toward / distant bog shore / drowning cedar roots recede into their dark wet shadows

cross / an old dock’s rotten planks in the bracken / it sinks & rises seasonally / slowly I move what’s left of me out farther / deeper

cataloguing senses / I am & still human / tall cedar trunks drum dense meaning / beak-feeding a single surviving chick / a pair of loons alternately dive-rise-dive for shrimp / young blackbirds stalk parents through last years’ rustling bulrushes for more of everything / each move driven to single-pitched focus / time is as death / a riotous surviving choreography / caught up in us all / still-words edge out meanings / still my body wants

below / amber shafts of sunlight plumb peaty waters / the soft-pitched nibbling hum of toads shading / beneath the mossy raft/

above / swooping swallows’ free fall accuracy / streaking turquoise flatten-dent surface / sea to sky traverse / liquid clouds ripple / elongate / merge meaning

from somewhere closer / this need to relocate small-self perspective / reaches myopic dimensions / attends to two inch water scorpions / how they glide atemporally through / refracted watery blues of a disappearing cosmos / through the opaque movement that might perhaps be my body / if i looked

and the feel of cool light mud / soup of mud-ocean bog / through my opening up skin moves softly / untouches barely / spreads inside uncurling toes feet thighs hips backbone / dissolves tight ribs from tighter frame / slowly pours into cheekbones / rises up into & through my skull / softly / greedily / i ingest fertile renewal / loosely sink & rise from somewhere near dying

(Maria Walther, spring 2009)
Chapter Six: Social work at the intersection of ecofeminism and spirituality

From the survey, we found the women defined health as including a good diet, exercise, no substance abuse, adequate rest and food. The majority added a First Nations' perspective which is holistic. They answered that health is not only physical, but includes emotional and spiritual. Some related the medicine wheel analogy that states that if one is out of balance with any of the domains, then she is unhealthy. Sickness, illness results from an imbalance (Deter & Otway, 2001, p 19).

If you are doing the right thing ecologically, the results will be social and spiritual as well as ecological. If you are doing the right spiritual things, there will be social and ecological results (Deborah Bird Rose cited in Warren, 2000, p 213)\(^{34}\).

Healing is viewed as personal and societal recovery from the lasting effects of oppression and systematic racism experienced over generations. Many Aboriginal people are suffering not simply from specific diseases and social problems, but also from a depression of spirit resulting from 200 or more years of damage to their cultures, languages, identities and self-respect. The idea of healing suggests that to reach 'whole health', Aboriginal people must confront the crippling injuries of the past. Yet, doing so is not their job alone. Only when the deep causes of Aboriginal ill health are remedied by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together will balance and harmony—our health and well-being be restored (RCAP 1996, cited in Deter & Otway, 2001, p 109).

First, women from Asia, Africa, and Latin America are much less likely to forget, unlike Northern women, that the base line of domination of women and of nature is impoverishment of their people, particularly women and children, and the impoverishment of the land. Second, although many women of Asia, Africa, and Latin America are deeply interested in recovering patterns of spirituality from a pre-Christian past, these spiritualities are those of their own indigenous roots. They are not fetched in as an idealized story from long ago and far away with which one has no cultural experience, but rather this pre-Christian indigenous past is still present. It has been broken and silenced by colonialism and Christianization, but it is still present in the contemporary indigenous people of one's own land—descendants of one's own indigenous ancestors, or even as customs with which the woman writer herself grew up in her earlier years (Ruether, 1996, p 6).

In the two previous chapters I have canvassed aspects of social work, namely its overarching mandate of anti-oppressive praxis (including the applicability of the CASW Code of Ethics 2005 in this context) at the intersections of socio-cultural, gender, and ecological oppression within Canada and globally, with a focus on Indigenous women and the nonhuman environment. My emphasis has been on contextualizing the interrelatedness of oppressive

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practices within the colonial history of Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples and critically inquiring into social work ethics and its potential of decolonizing agency in the context of these interconnecting oppressions. In this chapter I explore the potential of ecofeminism\textsuperscript{35} as a (post)colonial critique and holistic paradigm in the context of (post)modern globalization and re/colonization. I will also explore ecofeminism’s potential as an alternative discourse in mainstream culture and, more specifically, in the domain of social work. Since there is a strong focus in ecofeminism on cultural, ecological, gender justice and holistic practices, I will examine both social work and ecofeminism at the intersection of holistic meaning-building and spirituality.

When I set out to write this thesis I knew that I needed to shape it as an exercise in hope and affirmation of life, for several reasons. I have found that social work in its multiple forms (both as professions and diverse ways of life) is an experience that ranges from intense bitterness to soul-stunning sadness to exuberant joy and a sense of being radically present in the world in a socially transformative capacity. I have also found that the pervasive discourse of globalization needs to be challenged in meaningful, forward-looking ways that are focused on social work’s inherent possibilities and potential. I want to challenge the current trend in Canadian provincial and federal governance which is moving away from supporting social/collective structures and protecting public goods and instead is moving further toward the cultivation of individualistic, competitive, exploitative regimes that support privatization of public goods and the pathologization of people’s experiences of socially constructed oppressions. Through this thesis I participate in challenging this globalizing discourse, and I participate in conceptualizing

\textsuperscript{35} There has been much debate regarding the use of ‘ecofeminism’ in the singular form as with other umbrella terms, my usage of ‘ecofeminism’ refers to the overarching set of theories, ethics, research and political activism, as elsewhere there is a rich debate among ecofeminists regarding the contradictory and conflicted theoretical positions, however for the purposes of this paper the concept of ecofeminism will be sufficient as a cluster of interrelated strategic positions.
alternative discourses that will bring our energies together in making new meanings that practice just and respectful interdependence among people, all relations and this planetary environment. In exploring the meaningfulness and applicability of ecofeminism to social work I expand social work’s potential as anti-oppressive agent in the context of (post)colonial globalization.

Intersectionality as research paradigm and methodological tool opens up new conceptualizations regarding the integral interconnectedness of multiple oppressions in ways that add-on analyses like gender-based analysis cannot. Through intersectional analysis we can come to understand that embedded at the core of colonizing globalization as a system of oppressions are the interlocked oppressions of women—specifically visible minorities, women of colour and Aboriginal/Indigenous women—and the nonhuman environment. Ecofeminism in itself is a form of intersectional analysis that constitutes a consolidated network of ethics, theories, research and praxis. However, as with most if not all theories and praxis, ecofeminism has also struggled with conflicting, contradictory concepts and theories. In its beginnings ecofeminism was not received favourably in the feminist academic community because it was seen as supporting essentialist notions of the category ‘women’ and cultivating grassroots activism in combination with an emphasis on spirituality. (Post)structuralist feminist practice which questions the construction of universalizing, stable notions of ‘woman’ has been extremely meaningful in decentering white feminist privilege and opening up the debate to acknowledge women’s subject positions as situated, strategic, mobile, and nomadic (Sturgeon, 1997). However, the concern became a political and practical one, as Sturgeon writes, because,

[H]ow can feminist coalitions be created without assuming (or requiring) that all women are the same in some essential way, relying on some notion of natural or universal female characteristics? The rationale for women acting together politically against sexism

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16 For further information please see chapter one on intersectional methodology.
contains its own challenge: if feminists argue that 'femininity' and women’s material inequality in relation to men are not biologically determined but socially constructed, historically specific, and variously shaped by hierarchies of race, class, culture, and sexual orientation, how can feminism work against the oppression of women as a group based on gender? (p. 17)

This debate is not new and feminists have been grappling with it for the past thirty years (Brodribb, 1992). However, ecofeminism emerged as a diaspora of political strategies primarily in the United States where activist and academic feminists mobilized around a cluster of environmental issues like toxic waste (Love Canal), deforestation, military and nuclear weapons policies (Nevada Test Site), reproductive rights and technologies, animal liberations, and domestic/international agricultural developments (Warren, 2000). The purpose of ecofeminist initiatives has been to challenge male-dominated capitalistic patriarchal activities that center around the twin exploitations of women and the nonhuman environment. Sturgeon (1997) suggests that, because ecofeminism carries such activist agency, “it [ecofeminism] is potentially a meeting ground for contemporary radical movements’ (p. 19). At the same time, and unconcerned about feminist theorizations on universalism, constructionism and essentialism in privileged academic settings, women in different parts of the world were mobilizing themselves and working in smaller and larger groups to challenge (post)colonial globalization that threatened to destroy the basis of their livelihoods, i.e., forests, clean water, farm lands\(^37\). As

\(^{37}\) Perhaps the best known of these is the Chipko movement in which local Indian women, after lengthy political battles, coordinated the protection of their local forest (the source of their employment through wood products and sap-gathering and a guard against soil erosion) against a local contractor by hugging the trees (from a feminist angle it is significant to note that the contractor was the husband of the women who led the tree-hugging initiative). They then organized similar efforts for women in other, distant villages. Similarly, the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, a tree-planting initiative that spread to several other African countries, was organized through the National Council of Women to provide employment for women, solve the fuel problem, and combat desertification and soil erosion. While it is important to be mindful of the diversities of women, their identities and struggles, it is equally important
Mellor (1997) writes, “[W]hat is common to women’s grassroots campaigns, North and South, is women’s vulnerability to environmental problems and their lack of access to the centres of decision-making which cause them” (p. 24). She contends that women are disproportionately represented in poor and vulnerable communities, while men are disproportionately represented in positions of power and influence. Not only do women disproportionately bear the consequences of government, military, commercial and industrial decisions, but it is predominantly men who make them. Warren (2000) summarizes eight key features of an ecofeminist ethics:

1. Theory-in-progress: continuously evolving over time;
2. Nothing is part of ecofeminist ethics that promotes any ‘isms of domination’ (i.e., sexism, racism, classism, ageism, naturism, ablism, and others);
3. Contextualist ethics: contextualization of individuals’ stories and their relationships with other voices/narratives; how the dynamics of interrelatedness function is of central significance;
4. Inclusivist ethics: pluralist, in that it presupposes and maintains difference and at the same time recognizes commonalities; also, recognition of humans as ecological selves and members of ecological communities;
5. Illumination of intersubjectivity and impossibility of objective knowledge;
6. Central significance of values underrepresented in conventional ethics: values of care, love, friendship, appropriate trust, and others;
7. Reconception of what it is to be human and ethical decision-making;

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to consider the commonalities that have prompted women in all parts of the world to challenge these oppressive (post)colonial practices (Mellor, 1997).
8. Reconception of human reason as the defining criteria of humanness but rather rational and emotional intelligence as aspects for ethical motivation, reasoning and practice;

There are obvious overlappings between social work ethics and ecofeminist ethics in most areas. Where social work differs is on issues of oppression analysis (it is only now beginning to acknowledge naturism and has not made the link between the subjugation of women and the nonhuman environment), inclusivity (it is only slowly beginning to see humans as ecological selves), and the twin issues of a reconceptualization of humanness and reason as its primary criteria.

The significance of ecofeminist analysis is its comprehensive critique of the ways in which (post)colonial globalization detrimentally impacts the nonhuman environment and women’s health, economic well-being and rights, in interlocked multiple ways (Mellor, 1997; Sturgeon, 1997; Warren, 2000). More recently, social work has begun to take an interest in including environmental analysis as a frame of reference in its anti-oppressive inquiry. However, little efforts have been made to date to expand the critique and look more closely at the ways in which (post)colonial oppression centers itself at the intersection of women and the environment. Instead, deep ecology is foregrounded as a relevant and appropriate critique, and while deep ecology critically examines the fall-out of globalization at the intersection of ecology and people, it cultivates an anthropocentric perspective that remains oblivious to the genderization of (post)colonialism and the feminization of poverty (Besthorn, 2002; Canda, 2002; Coates, 2003). Insisting on an anthropocentric approach ignores the ontological and epistemological framework of the globalizing discourse: the result is a further entrenching of the same destructive processes that caused systemic gender inequality in the first place. Notwithstanding, the provision of an
analysis of social work and deep ecology for the purpose of challenging existing global maldevelopments is an important first step since, as discussed earlier, social work’s consideration of the nonhuman environment has been narrow, conceptualized as a social geography of person-in-environment theory. In the preface to his book *Ecology and Social Work* (2003) Coates recognizes social work’s potential to challenge the current global patterns of environmental and human crisis:

This book accepts that a serious environmental crisis exists and that this crisis is of such magnitude that the human community can no longer rest solely on a faith that science and technology will discover new materials to replace exhausted resource, uncover methods to deal with toxic waste, and provide all the food and means for an adequate standard of living for the billions of people who are poor and underemployed....Social work has a long history of involvement in social justice issues, and the profession has argued for the rights of all people to an adequate standard of living....However, despite its mandate, the profession has not seriously considered the environmental crisis, nor has it considered the tasks and demands of a new vision....To identify its response to the modern environmental crisis, social work must step outside traditional modes of thinking and action embedded in the industrial enterprise, articulate and critique the current situation and identify the kind of responses it wishes to see in place.

(p. 3)

As with considerations regarding the conspicuous absence of a critique of Christianity as a powerful colonizing force, I think that within social work we need to critically examine the absence of a gendered analysis in the face of the overwhelming global social/environmental evidence. In a globalizing culture steeped in the prescriptive cultural construction of
heterosexuality, the step from anthropocentrism to androcentric analysis may simultaneously the 
most logical yet most radical step we can take, I think. The hesitancy and often resistance to 
taking this step on the part of international human rights organizations, governments\(^\text{38}\) and 
corporations speaks to the enormous scope of this issue and its almost complete pervasiveness. 
The pervasiveness of gender inequality as a culturally conditioning, legal authorization and 
endorsement across the spectrum of human existence in both private and public spheres makes 
the step so radically necessary and challenging.

For feminists and ecofeminist alike, the deep ecology analysis is not only controversial 
but fundamentally flawed and defective. The conceptualization of man and/or genderless people 
at the core of deep ecology perspectives erases the colossal inequalities experienced by women – 
for being women – in addition to a multitude of related and compounding oppressions (age, 
disability, single parenting, race, ethnicity, indigeneity and many others) which centers them at 
the core of the oppressions spectrum, and certainly at the core of the intersectional analysis 
regarding people and the environment. It can no longer be enough for us to suggest that social 
work join other social movements in pursuit of alternative paradigms, and to reduce ecofeminism 
to the same level as ‘voluntary simplicity’ and ‘ecumenical efforts toward social justice’ (Coates, 
2003, p. 84) It is likewise insufficient to mention important insights that can be gained from 
writers in areas such as ecofeminism when there is no clear reflection of these insights, i.e., at the 
very least a gender-based analysis positioned at the centre of the human-environment critique.

Ecofeminism does nothing less than explode conventional anthropocentric paradigms and

\(^{38}\) There are two powerful reminders of the resistance to gender equality, specificity and inclusivity at the international political scene of all the countries who ratified The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, (175 parties as of 10 December 2003) and the Optional Protocol (75 parties as of January 9, 2004), the United States has signed neither. Secondly, CEDAW remains the only international Convention that exists to eliminate discrimination against women (Kambel, 2004) I caution that this may have changed since 2004, but the incontrovertible fact remains that perhaps the most powerful democratic nation in the world had refused to ratify this vitally needed Convention since its ratification in 1981.
demand a reconceptualization at the very foundation of our oppression-analysis. While I feel conflicted to highlight problematic areas in a field that I deeply respect and support, I think it is important to consider where social work is positioned in relation to these very significant issues. This positioning is a reflection of where we understand ourselves to be in the ontological and epistemological realm on critical issues, and where we may be prepared to go in our inquiry concerning pressing issues at the national and international scale. The great potential for social work as a critical political arena to pursue social justice within the global complexity lies, I think, in the combination of its self-criticality as a praxis, its mandate toward justice for all people, and its identity as a praxis that pushes its inquiry through ethical/theoretical/discursive strategies and realizing its findings through concrete implementations (Coates, 2003; Mullaly, 2002; Payne, 2005). Given ecofeminism’s analysis of oppressions at the very heart of planetary existence, where oppressive practices regarding women, particularly Indigenous women, and the nonhuman environment intersect, and given social work’s overlapping concerns with gender equality and justice in its various forms, I think it is vital that social work consider seriously the intersections of gender and nonhuman environment and how this will inform social work praxis at the micro (individuals, families and communities) and macro levels (across disciplines and national boundaries). This applies to both Canadian and international social work.

At this point, rather than cultivating a divide between social work and ecofeminism I want to build on a significant domain that both share: holistic practice and spirituality. While the notion of spirituality is still relatively recent in eurocentric social work (in contrast with most Aboriginal and Indigenous social work praxis), ecofeminist spirituality has been a mobilizing and politicizing agent in many ecofeminist initiatives (Warren, 2000). According to Warren, ecofeminist spiritualities are feminist, because they commit to the elimination of male-gender
privilege and power over women in myths, rituals, symbols, language and value systems. They are spiritual because they explore the affirmation of life-affirming powers, energies, and beings other than/in addition to our own individual ego. And thirdly, they are ecofeminist because they commit to challenge oppressive practices regarding women and nonhuman others; they also commit to developing earth-respectful and care-sensitive practices toward all humans and earth others. While spirituality is still a recent phenomena in the Canadian social work profession and therefore loosely defined, it seems to express similar values and beliefs: as the “human search for a sense of meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relations with oneself, other people, the universe, and the ground of being however that’s understood” (Canda, 2006, p. 8), as “the connection to all that is in existence” (Baskin, 2002, p. 2), and as “a process of making meaning” (Coholic, 2002, p. 8). Kruk (2006) directly links spiritual values to clinical social work practice, identifying spirituality as those qualities at the core of human existence which have been harmed and need to be restored in social work clients: “the restoration for human dignity, the need for honour and respect, equality and autonomy” (p. 16).

Yet in social work literature and textbooks the consideration of spirituality quite often tends to become subsumed under aspects of holistic orientation or slotted under the smaller heading Aboriginal or ‘cultural/ethnic approaches’. This may have emerged from a growing recognition of the cultural diversity of social work clients and the subsequent acknowledgment that practitioners ought to have a broader understanding of spiritual traditions to better meet the needs of clients, should these wish to bring up the subject (Payne, 2005). Payne combines spirituality with humanism and existentialism, and sums up the more traditional eurocentric assumption of spirituality: “[U]nderstanding the spirituality of many minority ethnic groups in Western countries is important to adequate understanding of their social and personal needs” (p.
181). This conclusion may prove useful in clinical social work practice, however, it fails to accommodate the increasing potential of spirituality and spiritual practice in social work in these (post)colonial globalizing times. Not only does this kind of dismissive discursive framing maintain hegemonic binarism by juxtaposing a dominant ‘white’ perspective against those of ethnic minority groups, it also reinforces the trivialization of cultural sensitivity, or, as it is often questionably called, ‘cultural competency’. Baskin (2002) directs attention to a 1994 study on the issue of including spirituality in social work practice where 90.1% of the respondents thought spirituality was only relevant to multicultural diversity, not because there was “a spiritual dimension to human existence that needs to be addressed by social workers” (p. 4). After interviewing twenty self-identified feminist social workers, Coholic (2002) reports their hesitation to ‘come out’ among their peers out of concern of “being ostracized, judged and/or ridiculed by other social workers if they discussed spirituality in social work contexts” (p. 4). As a consequence, “incorporations of spirituality occurred without discussion and feedback with colleagues, without guiding frameworks, and with feelings of caution and even apprehension.” The implications are enormous regarding the content of social work discourse/praxis and the ways in which this discourse/praxis is shaped through underlying, grounding ethics. Reducing notions of spiritual practice to specific categories again proclaims traditional eurocentric ontologies of what constitutes the appropriate realm for knowledge, what can be drawn upon as knowledge sources and consequently, what ontological and epistemological inquiries shape social work as a continuum of knowledge production and praxis. This affects whether or not social workers include spirituality as a significant thematic module in practice39, and it also

39 Within clinical practice, spiritual assessment tools like spiritual intervention frameworks (Derezotes et al., 2008) and spiritual lifemaps, spiritual genograms and spiritual eco-maps are being designed to help mental health professionals identify clients’ specific spiritual assets/strengths and adapt to more culturally sensitive practice
affects how social work considers spirituality as a structural component of social work itself that helps to conceptualize social work ‘from the ground up’, as a holistic structural pathway of how social workers understand social work

The eurocentric hesitancy to open social work toward historically ‘othered’ and colonized knowledges, which form significant and often core traditions for healing/helping practices in most non-Western countries and virtually all Indigenous cultures is a lingering yet deep-seated refusal and fear a) to decolonize our own cultural identities/practices, b) to begin the process of ethical accountability and c) to attend to new understandings of what knowledge may mean in the social work domain. The dilemma is that social work as a product of modernist social sciences has also been a product of imperialist, colonizing ideology, discourse and research practices. Its conviction of the superiority of eurocentric ideologies and their quantification/objectification of knowledge claims is deeply rooted and has meant the historical culpability of social research in the exploitation and ‘otherization’ of non-eurocentric knowledges (Absolon & Willett, 2005, T. Smith, 2001). More recently, social work’s integration of (post)modernist theories enables us to begin addressing traditional colonizing practices, their ideological and discursive embeddedness, and to be a vigilant witness to social work’s ongoing collusion in maintaining these practices wherever they occur. I briefly want to summarize how I understand the challenge and potential of social work in moving toward a more grounding oppression analysis and at the same time create less culturally appropriating, holistic and spiritual practices

1. That social work learn more fully to recognize its eurocentric, colonizing collusion,

(Hodge, 2006) The challenge for social workers is to self-critically examine to what degree these tools are biased in favour of their own belief system (Weaver, 2008)
2. That social work unpack its colonizing praxis as far as possible;
3. That social work acknowledge that in order to do this, we need diverse knowledges/practices;
4. That social work understand the need for deeper holistic practice to inform its own decolonization; that it creates the conditions for reframing and honouring its work while including difference-centered perspectives on holistic practices and spirituality;
5. That social work recognize the risk of appropriating spiritual practices on western/eurocentric terms, thereby further exploiting them;
6. That social work acknowledge that the frames of reference need to shift: that it respectfully begins to attend to non-eurocentric frames of reference as a process of decentering eurocentric privileging.

Social work practitioners have begun this process in research, conferences and papers but we need to unpack our own colonizing traditions and material conditions for knowledge production – this means ethical accountability and practising cultural humility, honouring and mindfulness.

Of particular significance and concern is the issue of cultural appropriation. The colonizing history of eurocentrism was made possible precisely because it had shed its diverse belief system of earth-centered, connective spiritualities in the wake of the scientific revolution and the ascent of enlightenment and modernity. Eurocentric conviction in humans’ detachment from – and superiority over – the nonhuman environment, supported through Christian religions, has become a system of deep-seated cultural beliefs and values. Consequently, there is a yawning spiritual emptiness that no amount of religious dogma/indoctrination has been able to fill. The tendency to appropriate and colonize spiritual practices of different cultures can be seen in the
well developed consumer industry catering to New Age eclecticism on very superficial, materially privileged levels. T. Smith (2001) cautions that “[A] recent phenomenon which partly explains such a position is the Western fascination with New Age spiritual meanings which makes our own belief systems available, yet again, for further mining and exploitation” (p. 6). Ruether (1996) also recognizes this tendency in the context of ecofeminism, suggesting that this is a challenge for Northern Hemisphere ecofeminist spiritualities because the

[Psycho-spiritual reconnecting with women’s bodies and nature can become a recreational self-indulgence for a privileged counter-cultural Northern elite if these are the only ideas and practices of ecofeminism; if the healing of our bodies and our imaginations as Euro-Americans is not connected concretely with the following realities of over-consumption and wealth: the top 20 percent of the world’s human population enjoys 82 percent of the wealth while the other 80 percent scrapes along with 18 percent; and the poorest 20 percent of the world’s people, over a billion people – disproportionately women and children – starve and die early from poisoned waters, soil and air” (p. 5)

Instead, Ruether urges affluent nations to look into their own heritages and cultivate what is life-affirming and healing rather than appropriating rituals and practices of Indigenous peoples: “only in this way can we begin to find how to be true friends and sisters with women – with people – of other worlds, no longer as oppressors trying to suppress other people’s identities but also not as ‘white blanks’ seeking to fill our own emptiness at the expense of others” (p. 8).
Social work has begun to acknowledge this challenge. Regular annual conferences regarding spirituality and social work in the past ten years have taken place and an increasing number of research and essays attest to the fact that many North American social workers are interested in integrating spirituality into social work. In his presentation at the 2006 “First North American Conference on Spirituality and Social Work” Canda speaks about the development of global perspectives regarding spirituality and social work while at the same time pointing out some of the challenges: “in order to bring these trends to fulfillment, we need to honour our localities and also connect across our differences. We need to honour specifics, the particulars, and also that which transcends boundaries. A really amazing fact is that it’s now possible to access resources from most spiritual traditions all over the world. That leads to a lot of creativity and sometimes conflict.” (p. 21). I understand the very real challenge to be that eurocentrism as a globalizing force works embedded in a multitude of contexts in the private and public domains and at the individual and structural levels. Its effectiveness lies in part in its ability to disconnect people/us from their spiritual groundings and instead offer them/us a belief in the instant gratification of (strategically constructed) desires through hyper-consumption, material possibilities and unlimited economic growth. As a result, according to ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak (1997),

commitment to a purpose larger than self has all but disappeared from their everyday lives and any sense of community is narrowly defined. Detachment from other people and nature has created disenchantment, a vacuum in our being. Individualism and loss of community have resulted in the loss of a genuine sense of social commitment and social

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40 To illustrate how recent this spirituality ‘movement’ is, the First Canadian Conference on Spirituality and Social Work took place in 2002, and the First North American Conference on Spirituality and Social Work took place at the University of Waterloo, ON, May 25-27, 2006, (Canda, 2006).
and ecological responsibility. Commitment to community, both human and natural, have all but disappeared. (p. 36)

Interlocking oppressions attest to the absence of spirituality at the very core of eurocentric (post)colonization. Derezotes et al. (2008) emphasize the significance and pressing need for a turn toward spirituality and what they call ‘spiritual maturity’ to inform social work practice at the micro and macro level, suggesting that on the largest scale, the survival of humanity is now at risk. In a world armed with weapons of mass destruction, filled with ailing ecosystems, and populated with vast numbers of depressed, hungry, and thirsty people, the need for higher consciousness has never been more apparent. The case could be made that, now more than ever, we need spiritually mature leaders who can help form coalitions of spiritually maturing people across boundaries of nation, religion, class, gender, culture, and race. (p. 1)

Baskin (2002) describes the absence of spirituality as “a form of spiritual abuse which I experience as deeply wounding” (p. 2). She advances the notion of spirituality as a form of resistance, connecting us to social change work. Working toward social change is a strong mandate for both social work and ecofeminism. Grounding oneself in the practice of spirituality as a healing and mobilizing force is vital to ecofeminism as a social change agent. Ecofeminist activism itself is an outward expression of a deeply committed spiritual grounding in a belief of the respectful, egalitarian interdependence of all forms of life (Mellor, 2000, Sturgeon, 1997).

In view of the commitment to social change as a meaning-making generative process that allows for collaboration across the spectrum of justice movements, I want to recall the 2005 CASW Code of Ethics’ preamble which states that “the profession has a particular interest in the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and/or living in poverty. Social
workers are committed to human rights as enshrined in Canadian law, as well as in international conventions on human rights created or supported by the United Nations” (p. 3). I understand the implications of this statement filled with challenging potential and possibilities for social work as a social change praxis that works at all levels of the human experience. The preamble’s reference to social workers’ adherence to/and support of international conventions –like the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples –supported by the United Nations invites social work toward reconceptualizing its ethics regarding systemic oppressions at the intersections of culture, gender and ecological justice.

**blue whale**

massive blue whale
plankton-eating massive blue whale
powerful plankton-eating massive blue whale
peaceful
    powerful
    plankton-eating
    massive blue whale

*(Lars Walther, age 8)*

*31 I include this poem written by my son because it highlights how, from an intergenerational perspective of honouring the interdependence of life on this planet, children develop a deeper critical, respectful awareness of the nonhuman environment, in this case to the largest mammal on earth, demonstrating a consciousness of the ‘peaceful power’ of whales. Looking into the future, the cultivation of this kind of egalitarian, relational consciousness is critical to the survival of this planet and all relations as well as to the survival of the human species.*
body-knowings

a path moves my feet across shadows
morning light plays circles
over soft ground

beside the path two small fir saplings
my sons & I planted last summer
of the kind foresters give out
to school children
like bits of truth when the time is ripe

we had placed rocks for shade
a bear must have moved through
last winter
foraging
in the hollow left behind
golden eyes blinking slowly
a toad rests

all it takes
this growing rush of feeling
running through
how everything moves
how we all are & matter deeply
trees rocks toad light circling shadows
a path moving
down to the meadow below

shaping event memories
in their wake
meanings we move to

(Maria Walther, spring 2010)
peace carriers

in the palms of our hands
see we carry peace for the world
not the winged peace of conditional forgiving
that soars high out of reach into a grasping sun god’s sky
nor the slanted cross
bound into cyclical forgettings
dancing across
the psychedelic frenzy of unconcern

this was then as it is now
a time of implicated un/knowing
when we move
little known to our sexual selves
& fugitive truths of how we
live each
in the other with
colonizing vengeance

in the palms of our hands
see we carry peace for the world

unclenched sufferings we hold
in our hands
ecstatic surrender
to the earth and all that holds us

(Maria Walther, fall 2009)
Chapter Seven: Where are we at and how do we move forward

When we remove the blinders that arise from the construction of ethics as an individual cognitive act, we are more able to see ethics as part of social relations that condition both the perception of ethics and the interpretive processes that accompany application of ethics. The very conditions for ethics were not perceived as part of ethics and therefore part of one’s professional responsibility. Thus, ethics, recognized by professionals as a primary professional obligation, remained partitioned off in a rarefied space of codes and unused cognitive frames, while ‘politics’ – the social relations of ethics – was experienced as a kind of inevitable, omnipresent irritation that must be accepted as ‘part of life’ rather than as a professional obligation. (Rossiter et al., 2000, p. 96)

A minority of the human race is able to live as if it were not embodied or embedded, as if it had no limits, because those limits are borne by others, including the earth itself. Physical resources, social time and space are claimed by those who can transcend embodiment. It is lost by those who have to meet the needs of others, whether through love or obligation as wives, mothers, carers, through exploitation as slaves and workers, or through patterns of exclusion on the basis of sex, class, ‘race’, caste or ethnicity. These negative patterns are created by patterns of dependence that are not acknowledged. Embracing immanence means taking political responsibility for the social and ecological consequences of bodily existence. (Mellor, 2000, p. 190)

We need to transcend the rules and limitations of the English language to make it work for us as Indigenous peoples. Cole’s (2002) research and poetry is an example of such transcendence. In poetic form, Cole demonstrates First Nations’ knowings as a legitimate discourse in education and research through the analogy of a canoe journey. His poetry integrates Aboriginal epistemology and validates frameworks derived from Indigenous knowledge. Cole (2002) contends that paragraphs and chapters are meaningless, and that academically correct punctuation distances Aboriginal research methods from Indigenous concepts of space, time, and speech patterns. Ultimately, we know that the meaning of our words will often be overlooked or misunderstood not only because there is no adequate way to express our meaning in English, but also because many people lack the epistemological framework to understand it. (Absolon & Willett, 2005, p. 115)

In this project I have combined two embedded methodologies to explore the interconnections of conceptualizations and lived reality: a) through the methodological approach of discourse/documentary analysis and autoethnography I traced the interrelatedness of discourse and ethics in the production and legitimization of knowledge in specific location in modernist/(post)modernist social work; b) through intersectional analysis I examined systemic oppressions at the intersections of gender, culture and ecology: how they can be contextualized...
through Canadian social work and how this in turn can inform social work praxis with respect to anti-oppressive practices in the context of a hopeful global tomorrow. I will begin by briefly recalling my earlier thoughts regarding the use of language:

My findings will not merely be insights gathered through what content information I have gathered and what I have discussed; my findings will certainly also be what pathways I chose during this discussion, how I used language as a way of knowing, as a method of inquiry, and what insights I gathered during my writing discovery. Consequently, questions that speak to the content inquiry of intersectional analysis may address discursive inquiry at the conceptual level but in different ways: Where have we chosen to situate ourselves as private and global citizens regarding the continuous spiral of our un/knowing? How do we know we are in a healthier, more mindful location than previously? What –if any –meanings have we built? What discursive strategies have proven meaningful in the inquiry? What is the role of language in this kind of inquiry and why? Where do we move from here toward further inquiry into these issues?

For better clarity – because language is linear and writing even more so – I attempt to speak to both methodologies separately and then address my insights regarding their interconnectedness. Finally, I explore how and where I see Canadian social work move within the thematic context of the thesis. The thesis does not present a final, static ‘output’ or closure. However, it does present a – to me – exciting, ongoing journey which I interrupt to formulate provisional insights as I identify them at this point in the knowing-process. First of all, I need to be truthful with myself and say that at this stage in the inquiry I find myself in a different location than I had anticipated. When I set out I had a research plan that delineated the scope and nature of the research. In the course of my analysis, the spiral of my writing/researching inquiry
took me through moments of intense unknowing even as I attempted to prop up my wavering frame of reference through relevant literature. Some time into the research I came to realize that this had been one of my goals, to open up my inquiry through the creative collaboration of writing: writing as discovery. Yet the experience was more powerful and, I suspect, in the long-term more empowering. As Richardson (2003) suggests “[W]riting as method does not take writing for granted, but offers multiple ways to learn to do it, and to nurture the writer” (p. 500).

The following insights speak to the textual format and the process of writing. I kept in mind Richardson’s five criteria while assessing the learning process (p. 522): contribution (does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life?), aesthetic merit (does the use of creative analytic practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses?), reflexivity (how has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text?), impact (does this affect me? Emotionally? Intellectually? Does this generate new questions), and expression of a reality (Does it seem ‘true’ – a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the ‘real’?)

Layering the text enabled me to think and conceptualize in multiple thought-streams as a braid or weave instead of one linear succession of thoughts. I reminded myself of Oliver’s (1992) theories regarding the social relations of knowledge production: how we continuously dis/allow ourselves the production of alternative knowledge because we conform to certain discursive rules and textual formats. The creatively discursive nature of the two methodologies with a deliberate focus on language as a legitimate locus of power was a freeing process of letting go. Choosing to write in this particular format allowed me to explore while writing, and explore writing as a pathway that in itself constitutes the legitimate production of partial provisional knowledge
through continuously re/positioning and relating my perception of self to my perception of my social context and epistemological reference frame.

Through the exploration of writing as method that broke open conventional academic format I consistently came up against my own set of personal assumptions about ‘appropriate’ knowledge, ‘academically sanctioned’ knowledge, and ‘irreverently liberating’ knowledge; my reflexive hesitations and confusion regarding the inclusion of poetry that depicted intimate experiences (i.e., aquifers rising) provided vital fertile space for rethinking these assumptions and my own collusion in fostering certain kinds of knowledge production over others. At the same time, academic requirements of referencing sources forced me to acknowledge the open-ended cyclicality of knowledge in continuously shifting patterns, which, subject to different discursive strategies, reconfigure themselves into diverse shades of meaning. Choosing to quote some authors over others and preferencing certain quotations over others was a formidable experience in relational strategizing and attempting to control moments of disquiet and uncertainty. For example, at various moments throughout my writing I read and experienced the same citations differently. Creating a textual collage – like wind chimes strategically positioned but whose intermingling sounds create their own interrelational melody clusters - had a profound effect on the process of my thinking, bridging, and relating ideas.

Writing as method emphasized to me the creation of knowledge as a continuously evolving, questioning process rather than a set of fixed data that can be contained and exhibited. The writing experience itself was empowering: it was an embodied way of doing research, as it inserted my experience as valid and re/confirmed research writing as a highly subjective, partially knowing, volatile exercise in negotiating power and ethics into a ‘knowledge’ producing process that will hold readers’ attention because they will be engaged and inspired.
Besides being empowering, the writing experience was deeply moving because the format allowed me to engage my senses and emotions as well as appeal to my sense of aesthetics. Ultimately, it validated my sense of self. Richardson highlights this challenge in conventional social science writing.

One reason then that some of our texts may be boring is that our sense of Self is diminished as we are homogenized through professional socialization, rewards, and punishments. Homogenization occurs through the suppression of individual voices and the acceptance of the omniscient voice of science as if it were our own. How do we put ourselves in our own texts, and with what consequences? How do we nurture our own individuality and at the same time lay claim to ‘knowing’ something? These are both philosophically and practically difficult questions (p. 502).

Choosing intersectional analysis as a way to conceptualize and work through the complexity of interlocking oppressions made me acknowledge their enormity. As I worked my way through the research, I began to realize the increased need for intersectionality as an effective format to avoid the prioritization of certain oppression analyses over others, particularly in an era of specialized experts and the formation of intra-disciplinary silo-knowledges. Approaching my inquiry from a white middle-class feminist perspective, intersectionality helped to decenter my multiple biases (Warren, 2000) and create the space necessary for examining other oppressions as well as the cumulative effect of their interactions. I was reminded again and again that “[F]rom an intersectional perspective, social categories are dynamic, historically grounded, socially constructed, and work at both micro and macro structural levels” (Hankivsky, Cormier & de Merich, 2009, p. 9).

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42 Please see glossary for further information on bias.
Exploring how social work, in particular social ethics, is situated in relation to the intersections of systemic oppressions in the material lived reality of Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples, was a challenging and insightful exercise. After examining the precarious state of global (post)colonization and the even more precarious nature of ethics in offering alternative ways of being-in-the-world, I come to think that the future of Canadian social work as (post)modern anti-oppressive practice lies in social workers also working collaboratively to move beyond state-mediated boundaries and cultivate a respectful framework of ethics that will endorse the fulfillment of basic human rights, needs and individual/collective responsibilities in cross-cultural inclusive and sensitive ways. This process requires long-term approaches and cross-cultural humility in order to be successful. I am reminded of Kreitzer (2006), who suggests that western assumptions, which dictate a worldview defining ‘man’ as having power over the world, time as being linear, rationalism as a central ideology, spirituality as non-existent and the written word as the only important knowledge, that these assumptions are ones Indigenous and non-western cultures will find highly problematic and insupportable as intrinsic values to their cultures: “[S]ocial work values stem from predominantly western social work values and have excluded the knowledge and practices of non-western cultures. The challenge for social work is to embrace diverse cultural paradigms” (p. 13).

Intersectionality enabled me to bring into stark relief the colossally devastating impact of (post)colonial globalization and its multiple, compounding oppressions in the material lives of Aboriginal/Indigenous women. It also highlighted the need for social work to reconceptualize and deepen the analysis of oppressions in the context of gender, culture and ecology. I realize that as social work practitioners we need to critically examine social work’s eurocentric heritage and collusion with globalizing practices through helping to maintain the eurocentric materially
privileged status quo. According to Coates (2003), “[I]n the past, social work has been called
upon to confront many of the negative consequences of modernity’s growth and ‘development’
imperative. Social work can continue its ameliorative role with victims of modern society’s
competitive, acquisitive and individualistic ideology and behaviour, or can assume a more
proactive role in transforming social values” (p. 10). At the same time I acknowledge Bent’s
(2004) strong cautionary words regarding cultural oppression: “the problem in trying to address
the many wellness issues that affect Aboriginal people stem from ontological and
epistemological assumptions that guided the creation and maintenance of health care systems in
Canada for centuries and contributes greatly to the health disparities between Aboriginal people
and the Euro Canadian population” (p. 9).

In my final analysis of ecofeminist and social work spirituality I explored what seem to
me twin strands of a shared life-affirming, life-sustaining ethics of care that, if nurtured with
cultural sensitivity and soul-searching mindfulness, become an inspiring, forward-pushing
directive in the midst of a global state of emergency. Like Somerville (2006) I think it is vital
that we continue to search for shared values/ethics that span cultures and political divides. The
notion of hope is a basic cultural ‘good’ regardless of its specific definition. In Somerville’s
words “hope and the search for meaning in life are linked, in that each helps us to find the
other....they are also linked in that the absence of either has the same impact on us: without
meaning or without hope, we believe that we cannot go on living” (p. 237).

What emerged through the embedded methodological inquiry was my realization that the
contested and little understood interface between conceptual formulations and material reality
lies in the discursive re/presentations of legislation and ethical codes. These are the discrete
spaces where discursive formulations of ethics into ideologies inform and direct people’s
materially lived conditions. They are discrete because we are socialized not to question their constructed authority, they seem detached, neutral, unbiased, prescriptive ratifications of people’s private and public conducts. This is the power of discourse, its ability to be set up as authority. As non-Aboriginal members of the Canadian community many of us never question or even reflect on the reality of the Indian Act as a shaping colonizing force within the (post)modern Canadian ‘democratic’ system. Many of us exercise the privilege of members of dominant society not to notice the codified tenets of oppression. As Absolon & Willett write “we [Aboriginal peoples] never make the assumption that our positionality is neutral. We never think to ourselves that we can treat each other the same, that there is some sort of generic Canadian person and that we can all be friends because we are not the same. Other people don’t have an Indian Act” (p. 103). I also refer to Rossiter et al. (2000), who caution that we must be vigilant to recognize the social relations of ontological/epistemological worldview processes (ethics, discourse) and not condition ourselves to accept them as given and unalterable. In searching for shared ethics to span cultural, socio-economic and gender divides, I suggest that as social workers we must begin by re-examining our own invested position and anti-oppressive agency with regard to systemic oppressions within Canada and how it is discursively constructed through legislation and codes of ethics.

In view of the previous discussion I would like to conclude the thesis by pondering at the conceptual and concrete level where are we at in the domain of Canadian social work given the challenges of (post)colonial globalization. I think that one of the things we need to undertake at this historically specific moment is to reconceptualize how we think of social work as anti-oppressive praxis and how we define the profession of social work as a social justice catalyst for the future: we are slowly changing our understanding of social justice issues as issues that are
embedded in gender, cultural and ecological justice issues; we are also beginning to understand
the globalizing patterns of these interconnected justice issues and their impact on people’s
physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health. I suggest that given these new (post)modern,
(post)colonial, global/izing realities, as social work professionals we need to redefine and
recontextualize social work in the national and global arena. What do I mean by this? First of all,
I think that we need to cultivate further understanding in social work regarding interrelations of
injustices. Secondly, we need to consider and integrate into social work the enormous
significance of the nonhuman environment as an intrinsic variable in the analysis of social
injustices. Thirdly, given that social work is an initiative concerned with the alleviation and
elimination of injustices, given the nature of increasing global interdependence at all levels of
human and nonhuman existence, and given the interconnectedness of cultural, gender and
ecological injustices, I think that we want to situate social work praxis at the center of gender
justice, ecological justice and cultural anti-oppression. This will enable us to create the necessary
ontological and epistemological framework that allows us to analyze and address social justice
issues across the broadest yet most relevant range of intersecting inequalities.

Figure 4. below provides a visual image of social work at the intersection of gender,
culture and ecology. I suggest that this re/positioning is vital to the successful continuation of
social work as social justice praxis. This re/positioning will enable social work practitioners to
gain a more grounded understanding of how cultural, gender and environmental issues impact
people’s lives (beginning with their own) and will enable them/us to address the full spectrum of
interrelated justice issues at the individual, societal and structural levels. I suggest that it is only
through a deeper understanding of how our material conditions, our embodied lives are
embedded within the intersecting injustices of gender, culture and ecology that we will be able to
build more inclusive social work praxis. This reconceptualization will allow us to revision the components and social/discursive processes that shape social work ethics, and will infuse social work mandates across the range of institutions, agencies, private practices and government.

Figure 4. Re/Conceptualization of Social Work in the new reality of globalization
As the Canadian social work profession becomes increasingly professionalized and social work training undergoes further standardization, I suggest that this provides an opportunity for us to shift the social work frame of reference to gain a more inclusive view of the intersections of injustices as they relate to global (post)colonialism. Within the Canadian social work context this reconceptualization will enable us to educate ourselves regarding the implications of the Indian Act as a center piece for authorizing and reinforcing injustices at the intersections of gender, culture and ecology. Critical examination of the social work profession’s collusion in maintaining the status quo of dominant society will enable us to move toward better, healthier relations with First Nations/Aboriginal peoples on various initiatives, from reworking the 2005 Code of Ethics to reflect social work’s reconceptualization to eventually creating more inclusive theories and more insightful social work practice. I think that a repositioning of social work will mean a more politically mobilized profession which is crucial in an era of globalizing pressures to conform to prescribed behaviour. Finally, the reconceptualization of social work at the intersection of gender, culture and ecology will provide enhanced opportunities to work cross-culturally and across nations toward a shared ethics that recognizes and addresses the differentiating impact of these interconnected injustices on the embodied realities of people’s lives around the world. Positioning social work at the centre of ecology, gender and culture will allow for full cross-cultural participation, and will uncover the systems of (cultural, gender, ecological) oppression that privilege certain people/nations over others.
speak from the heart if I have something to say

feeling the deep
unhinge smaller self

interblossoming

at this moment these pauses are
cosmic pulses far outside
your & my heart beats
moments before creation explodes
each heart
beat
cryptic belonging

no longer can I promise
how to belong
in the ruptured language of
/ intellectual property rights /
   / verticalgrowth / globalmarketderegulations /

too deeply meaning spawned
like the springing-forth tenderness
curled inside fiddleheads
unfolding from a place of core
it gently becomes vital to survival
& to locate cosmic meanings
we step into willingly

(Maria Walther, spring 2010)
global ripples

feel self slide into
long humid summer earth days
slide into smooth memory curves
tattoos of easy belonging

feel random time
slope away into
out of
dried up conversation wadis
people continue to
pass by each other as they

wait for rain to
fill existential promises
well water
tears

behind you
upon the precise moment it takes
to swivel being

surface breaks
smooth body cool water

loon glides over you

(Maria Walther, summer 2009)
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