

Theorizing Resurgence from within Nishnaabeg Thought

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WITH EDNA MANITOWABI

ONE OF THE MOST CRUCIAL TASKS PRESENTLY FACING INDIGENOUS nations is the continued creation of individuals and assemblages of people who can think in culturally inherent ways. By this, I mean ways that reflect the diversity of thought within our broader cosmologies, those very ancient ways that are inherently counter to the influences of colonial hegemony. I believe we need intellectuals who can think within the conceptual meanings of the language, who are intrinsically connected to place and territory, who exist in the world as an embodiment of contemporary expressions of our ancient stories and traditions, and who illuminate *mino bimaadiziwin* in all aspects of their lives.

Western theory, whether based in postcolonial, critical, or even liberatory strains of thought, has been exceptional at diagnosing, revealing, and even interrogating colonialism; and many would argue that this body of theory holds the greatest promise for shifting the Canadian politic, because it speaks to that audience in a language they can understand, if not hear. Yet Western theories of liberation have for the most part failed to resonate with the vast majority of Indigenous peoples, scholars, or artists. In particular, Western-based social movement theory has failed to recognize the broader contextualizations of resistance within Indigenous thought, while also ignoring the contestation of colonialism as a starting point. While I believe liberatory theory and politics are always valuable, Indigenous thought has the ability to resonate with Indigenous peoples of all ages.¹ It not only maps a way out of colonial thinking by confirming Indigenous lifeways or alternative ways of being in the world. Ultimately Indigenous theory seeks to

dismantle colonialism while simultaneously building a renaissance of *mitno bimaadiziwin*. What if this was our collective focus?

Part of being Indigenous in the twenty-first century is that regardless of where or how we have grown up, we've all been bathed in a vat of cognitive imperialism, perpetuating the idea that Indigenous peoples were not, and are not, thinking peoples—an insidious mechanism to promote neo-assimilation and obfuscate the historic atrocities of colonialism.² In both subtle and overt ways, the current generation of Indigenous peoples has been repeatedly told that individually we are stupid, and that collectively our nations were and are void of higher thought. This is reinforced when the academic industrial complex—often propped up by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)—promotes colonizing education for our children and youth as the solution to dispossession, poverty, violence, and a lack of self-determination in our lives. Cognitive imperialism also rears its ugly head in every discipline every time a student is told that there is no literature or no thinking available on any given topic from within Indigenous intellectual traditions.

Our elders and knowledge holders have always put great emphasis on *how* things are done. This reinforces the idea that it is our own tools, strategies, values, processes, and intellect that are going to build our new house. While theoretically we have debated whether Audre Lourde's statement "The master's tools can dismantle the master's house" is correct, I am interested in a different question. I am not so concerned with how we dismantle the master's house—that is, which sets of theories we use to critique colonialism—but I am very concerned with how we (re)build our own house, or our own houses. I have spent enough time taking down the master's house, and now I want most of my energy to go into envisioning and building our new house.

For me, this discussion begins with our creation stories, because these stories set the "theoretical framework," or give us the ontological context from within which we can interpret other stories, teachings, and experiences.³ These stories and their Nishnaabeg context are extremely important to our way of being, and they are told and retold in our communities throughout one's life. Our children first start to learn Nishnaabeg thought and theory through these *Aandiskokaman* very early in their lives.⁴ As they travel through the Four Hills of Life,⁵ these teachings deepen and resonate in different ways. Benton-Banai writes:

And so, Anishinaabe can see that if he knows his creation story, if she knows her creation story, they know also how all of life moves. They can know how life

comes to be. All of life is a creative process that began in this original way and continues in the same way in all aspects of our life. In all places and all facets of creation, and creative activity, these seven stages are reflected.⁶

Our elders tell us that everything we need to know is encoded in the structure, content, and context of these stories, and the relationships, ethics and responsibilities required to *be* our own creation story. In my own life, I did not fully understand this story until I became pregnant with my first child. My elder Edna Manitowabi guided me through my pregnancy, revealing the responsibilities that go along with bringing forth new life, with nurturing that life with my own sacred water, my thoughts, my emotions, my breath, and my own creative power. In doing so, Edna breathed into me a new way of seeing the world and of being in it. So for me, this is the only place to begin.

GWINMAAGEMI GDI-DBAAJIMOWINAANIN: WE TELL STORIES

Cree scholar, poet, and visual artist Neal McLeod has written extensively about the importance of storytelling in his book *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times*. Neal writes that the process of storytelling within Cree traditions requires storytellers to remember the ancient stories that made their ancestors "the people they were," and that this requires a remembering of language. He also emphasizes that storytellers have a responsibility to the future to imagine a social space that is just, and where Cree narratives will flourish.⁷ Storytelling is at its core decolonizing, because it is a process of remembering, envisioning, and creating a just reality where Nishnaabeg live as both *Nishnaabeg* and *peoples*. Storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed, and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice. Storytelling becomes a space where we can escape the gaze and the cage of the empire, even if it is just for a few minutes.

Oral storytelling becomes an even more important vehicle for the creation of free cognitive spaces, because the physical act of gathering a group of people together within our territories reinforces the web of relationships that stitch our communities together. The storyteller then has to work with emergence and flux, developing a unique relationship with the audience based entirely on context and relationships. Who is in the audience? Where

are they from? Which clans are present? What age groups? What challenges are individuals, families, and communities going through? What personal gifts does the audience bring with them? What emotions do people bring? Which moon are we in? This context provides the storyteller with information s/he uses to decide what to tell, and how to tell it, to gain both individual meaning and collective resonance. The relationship between those present becomes dynamic, with the storyteller adjusting their "performance"⁸ based on the reactions and presence of the audience. The lines between storyteller and audience become blurred as individuals make non-verbal (and sometimes verbal) contributions to the collective event. The "performance," whether a song, a dance, or a spoken-word story, becomes then an individual and collective experience, with the goal of lifting the burden of colonialism by envisioning new realities.

While this is now also accomplished by Indigenous artists through the written word, spoken word, theater, performance art, visual art, music and rap, film and video, it is most powerful in terms of transformation in its original cultural context because that context places dynamic relationships at the core. When mediated through print or recording devices, these relationships become either reduced (technology that limits interactivity) or unilateral (as in print, film, or video, when the creator cannot respond to the reaction of the audience). Then the process, to me, loses some of its transformative power because it is no longer emergent.

Storytelling is an important process for envisioning, imagining, critiquing the social space around us, and ultimately challenging the colonial norms that our daily lives are fraught with. In a similar way, dreams and visions propel resurgence because they provide Nishnaabeg with both knowledge from the spiritual world and processes for realizing those visions. Dreams and visions provide glimpses of decolonized spaces and transformed realities that we have collectively yet to imagine.

This is a thread that runs through this entire book, but begins here with the consideration of a creation story. There are several different creation stories within Nishnaabeg cosmology, and these stories are epics in and of themselves, often taking several hours or even days to tell. It is not ethically appropriate for me to tell these stories here, since these stories are traditionally told by elders who carry these responsibilities during ceremony or under certain circumstances. They are not widely shared. However, sketches of these stories have been printed by some of those elders themselves.⁹ Relying on these published versions, and versions I have heard told in workshops and elders conferences (so in public *not* ceremonial contexts), I wish to bring attention to four tenets of the story that directly relate to the role

of intellectual pursuits and theory in relation to resurgence; and I want to reclaim the context for interpretation of these teachings. One print version of this story is by Eddie Benton-Banai and is known as the Seven Fires of Ojibway Creation.¹⁰ The following version was told to me by Edna Manitowabi, and she spent a lot of time explaining this story in the context of her own life and in the context of her work with our young women. It is printed here with her permission.

GRANDMOTHER TEACHINGS BY EDNA MANITOWABI

My name is Asinykwe and I am a relative of Mkwā, the Bear.¹¹ I am from Wiwemikong, Mnídoo Minísing. My father was Gaazongii (John Mnídoo Abi). My mother was Naakwegizigokwe (Mary Louise Trudeau),¹² and she was a relative of Jijak (Crane). My mother lost nine children to residential school. I was the last to go. I went searching for these teachings as a way of recovering from this loss.

Dreamtime has always been a great teacher for me. I see my dreams as guides or mentors, as the Grandfathers and Grandmothers giving me direction in my life. Dreams are how my own spirit guides me through my life. In the mid-1970s, a dream led me to ceremonies and to the Little Boy water drum. When I first heard the sound of the Little Boy and felt his incredible vibration quivering through every cell and every fiber of my being, I knew I had come home, because I had dreamed of that Little Boy long before then.

I vividly recall the way the Little Boy was dressed the first time I saw him. He wore a headband with Seven Teaching Stones on his head. These symbolize the Seven Fires or the Seven Stages. I have tried to live my life according to these teachings, especially now as I move into my senior years. The time has come for me as a Grandmother, a teacher, and a Great-Grandmother to pass these on to the next generation of women. I have taken up this work and these responsibilities, and now I must remember these teachings, wear them, and pass them on to the younger generation of women who are now coming into that power time as a new woman spirit.

For a number of years now, I have had the honor and the privilege of preparing our young girls as they move into womanhood, and for helping young women, Mothers and Aunts who want to change their lives and have new understandings as Oshki-Nishnaabekwe¹³ and as Ogrichitaa.¹⁴ These are not easy transitions to make. As a Grandmother, I try to help young women understand what is happening to them when their Grandmother comes to visit for

the first time.¹⁵ It is important that we as Grandmothers, Mothers, and Aunts come together as women to help and support these young women. This is particularly important now as our Mother the Earth is going through her own cleansing. We reflect this cleansing when we renew ourselves with these teachings, ceremonies, fasting, and our rites of passage. We need to pass on the teachings of the sacredness of the water that sustains us, the air that we breathe, and the fire within us, so that our next generation of women have an understanding of what is happening to them during this powerful transition. Through these teachings they will then come to understand the Earth as their Mother. Through these teachings, they will then come to understand the Earth as themselves.

They will understand her seasons, her moods and her cycles.
They will understand that she is the Mother to all of Creation.
They will understand that she takes care of herself.
They will see that she is beautiful, sacred and that she was created first.
They will know that she holds a special place in our hearts because she is our Mother.

They will understand that our people connect to this land as their Mother.
We need to help our young people maintain this relationship and these teachings, because that connection is the umbilical bond to all of Creation.

When our young women understand this, they will understand their own seasons, cycles, and moods. They will understand that they are sacred and beautiful. They will understand that they must take care of themselves, and that they are the mothers to generations yet to be born.

We do this for our young women so they will be guided by our Mother's wisdom and so they will model themselves after this Earth. So they might grow up to be good and kind compassionate Anishinaabekwegawag. So they might know how to look after their children and their grandchildren. So that together, we might be a strong nation again. That is my dream. That is why I keep working. We do this work because we love our children. This is my purpose in life as a Grandmother and a Great-Grandmother. This is my purpose in life as a Kobaaade.¹⁶

In the beginning, before the beginning, there was only darkness and emptiness. In this cold, dark vastness there was a sound, a sound like the shaking of seeds in a gourd. Then there was one thought, the first thought. The thought of the Great Mystery, Creator, Gzhwe Mniidoo.¹⁷

Gzhwe Mniidoo's thoughts went out into the darkness. S/he knew s/he had to create a place for these thoughts, so Gzhwe Mniidoo created a circle in that

darkness, and within that circle s/he made a fire. At the center of the circle was the heartbeat of the Creator.

In the beginning, the first thought was the pulse and rhythm of Gzhwe Mniidoo. The thoughts and the heartbeat went out into the vastness. The thoughts and the vibrational sound of the heartbeat created the star world, the sky, and the universe. The Creator's first thought combined with the first heartbeat became the First Fire of Creation.

Within that great circle of the universe came another circle when Gzhwe Mniidoo made a fire creating light in that darkness. This is Creator's Second Fire, Giizis, the Sun. Within that great circle was the partner to the Giizis, our Grandmother the Moon. Dibiki-Giizis is the nighttime sun who would give us light in our darkness—the duality of all was created.

Grandmother Moon is the Grand woman of the universe, was given to govern the cycles. The seasons would renew all the life that would be created. The partnership of night and day was established, and this was the Third Fire of Creation. All of this was set into motion with the four sacred directions, and in doing so movement was created, the Fourth Fire of Creation.

Gzhwe Mniidoo then called on the beneshiinyak (birds) of every color, song, size, and shape. Gzhwe Mniidoo put all of the thoughts and creative energy into seeds and asked the beneshiinyak to spread the seeds. Those seeds carried all of the creative energy, all of the thoughts and the potential for all of life. This was the Fifth Fire of Creation.

Then Gzhwe Mniidoo made a place for those seeds to go. S/he made the most beautiful Woman, who we know as our Mother the Earth. Three times, Gzhwe Mniidoo tried. On the fourth try, s/he made our beautiful, round Earth. Gzhwe Mniidoo gave her a heart from the First Fire and placed it at the very core of her being. The very first woman created was a woman with a heart, with emotion, and it was a woman with a heart that would give birth to all of Creation.

Gzhwe Mniidoo looked upon Creation, the incredible beauty of the Earth, the waterways, the lakes and streams, the rivers. Her Life Blood flowing below and above the ground. These are the very waters of life that feed and nourish all of life, all of Creation. Her veins and her lifeblood, her bloodlines give life to all that Gzhwe Mniidoo had made. In all of that we would always know that we are joined together as one. We have the same Mother. We would always know she was created first, the first woman with a heart. When Creator finished Creation, Gzhwe Mniidoo gave it to her. You are the Creator now; you will create life and renew it. This is why these teachings are so important to our young women—when we bring forth new life they are reenacting this story.

When the seeds had been scattered on the face of the Earth, Gzhwe Mniidoo saw the beauty of her and how everything moved in harmony and in balance.

Gzhwe Mniidoo saw how everything was full and so complete, and Creator was filled with great joy. Gzhwe Mniidoo was filled with tears at this great joy, and they fell to the Earth, nourishing the land and the seeds mated to the soil.

And so from her breast, from her, came all that there is, and all that there will be; the winged of the air, the swimmers, the four legged, the flowers, the plants, the crawlers, the trees, and the seas that moved across the land. Upon her bosom reigned peace and happiness for ages and ages, and this was the Sixth Fire of Creation.

Original Man was the last to be created. Gzhwe Mniidoo wanted one who would reflect her/his thoughts, and so from the first woman s/he took four parts of her body—soil, air, water, and fire—and molded a being, a vessel. Gzhwe Mniidoo blew his/her own spirit breath into the being and gave him her/his own thoughts, and these thoughts were so vast that they spilled out of his head into his entire body. Gzhwe Mniidoo touched Original Man's breast, causing his heart to beat in harmony with the rhythm of the universe and with Gzhwe Mniidoo.

Gzhwe Mniidoo then lowered him down to the Earth so that he might also be a child of the great Mother. It is in that and with great kindness and humility, with the utmost gentleness, that Anishinaabe touched and met his Mother. This is the Seventh Fire of Creation.

This story is important for young women to know because they re-create this story in pregnancy. When we create new life, it is an extension of ourselves, just as Original Man was an extension of Gzhwe Mniidoo. In the same way, our thoughts, our breath, and our heartbeat pulse in the new life they carry in our sacred waters.

OUR THEORY IS PERSONAL

A theory in its most basic form is simply an explanation for why we do the things we do.¹⁸ When we think of theory in this way, the *Aandisokaanan* and our language encode our theories, and we express those theories in both the *Dibaa'jimiwinan*¹⁹ and our ways of being in the world. I have come to understand the *Dibaa'jimiwinan* as echoing the *Aandisokaanan*. Our personal creation stories, our lives, mirror and reflect the Seven Fires of Creation.

The starting point within Indigenous theoretical frameworks, then, is different from that within Western theories: the spiritual world is alive and influential, colonialism is contested, and storytelling, or "narrative imagination," is a tool to vision other existences outside of the current ones by

critiquing and analyzing the current state of affairs, but also by dreaming and visioning other realities.²⁰ The responsibility for finding meaning within these *Aandisokaanan* lies within individual Nishnaabeg, and this is communicated through our *Dibaa'jimiwinan*. Every Nishnaabeg has our own personal stories or narratives that communicate their personal truths, learning, histories, and insights. *Dibaa'jimiwinan* in this sense are personal opportunities to create. Our elders consider creation stories to be of paramount importance because they provide the ontological and epistemological framework to interpret other *Aandisokaanan* and *Dibaa'jimiwinan* in a culturally inherent way. It is critical, then, that these stories themselves are interpreted in a culturally inherent way, rather than through the obfuscated lens of imperial thought, because they are foundational, and they serve to build meaning into the other stories.

The first insight into Nishnaabeg theoretical foundations I would like to explore occurs in the Seventh Fire of Creation, after Gzhwe Mniidoo²¹ has dreamed the physical world through the first Six Fires. The First Fire created the universe through the union of the first thought (intellectual knowledge) with the first heartbeat (heart knowledge or emotion, truth). In the Second Fire, Gzhwe Mniidoo created the first fire and the Four Directions. In the Third Fire, duality exists for the first time. The Fourth Fire brings movement. By combining duality and movement, Gzhwe Mniidoo encapsulated his thoughts into seeds (the Fifth Fire), and the Sixth Fire was the creation of the first woman as a mother, the earth, so those seeds would have somewhere to go.

Gzhwe Mniidoo next created the first beings, but it took a very, very long time. S/he wanted to create the most beautiful beings possible. So Gzhwe Mniidoo dreamed. Gzhwe Mniidoo visioned. Gzhwe Mniidoo took time, tried some things out. S/he was careful and persistent, and finally, after a good length of time, Gzhwe Mniidoo lowered the first being, ever so gently, to earth. Nishna is our verb for "being lowered." Reclaiming the context of this story means that rather than saying or thinking that Gzhwe Mniidoo lowered an abstract "first person" to the earth, if I am a woman, I say or think Gzhwe Mniidoo lowered "the first woman to the earth."²²

That first being was the most beautiful thing Gzhwe Mniidoo had ever seen, and Gzhwe Mniidoo's heart swelled with love. Again, our elders teach us that this most beautiful, perfect, lovely being was not just any "First Person," but that it was me, or you. We are taught to insert ourselves into the story. Gzhwe Mniidoo created the most beautiful, perfect person possible, and that most beautiful, perfect person was me, Betasamosake.²³ What does this tell us about Nishnaabeg thought?

It is personal.

We were created out of love.

That the love of Gzhwe Mnidoo is unconditional, complete, and that s/he loves us the way we are, without judgment.

By inserting ourselves into these stories, we assume responsibilities—responsibilities that are not necessarily bestowed upon us by the collective, but that we take on according to our own gifts, abilities, and affiliations. Nishnaabeg theory has to be learned in the context of our own personal lives, in an emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual way. Every time I tell my children this story, or they hear this part of it in ceremony, their faces light up. It reaffirms that they are good, and beautiful, and perfect the way they are. Every time I have shared this part of our creation story with Indigenous students, their faces light up as well. When interpreted this way, our stories draw individuals into the resurgence narrative on their own terms and in accordance with their own names, clan affiliations, and gifts. For just a moment, they are complete in the absence of want—decolonizing one moment at a time. Indigenous thought can only be learned through the personal; this is because our greatest influence is on ourselves, and because living in a good way is an incredible disruption of the colonial metanarrative in and of itself. In a system requiring presence, the only way to learn is to live and demonstrate those teachings through a personal embodiment of *mino bimaadisiwin*. As Edna said in her creation story, we *wear* our teachings.

EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE, UNLIMITED INTELLIGENCE

The next part of the story, after Gzhwe Mnidoo has lowered me to the earth, tells us that Gzhwe Mnidoo put her/his right hand to my forehead and s/he transferred all of Gzhwe Mnidoo's thoughts into me. There were so many that the thoughts couldn't just stay in my head; they spilled into every part of my being and filled up my whole body. Gzhwe Mnidoo's knowledge was so immense from creating the world that it took all of my being to embody it.²⁴

This tells us that in order to access knowledge from a Nishnaabeg perspective, we have to engage our entire bodies: our physical beings, emotional self, our spiritual energy, and our intellect. Our methodologies, our lifeways must reflect those components of our being and the integration of those four components into a whole. This gives rise to our "research methodologies," our ways of knowing, our processes for living in the world.²⁵

It also tells us that there is no limit to Indigenous intellect. Gzhwe Mnidoo dreamed our world into existence. S/he dreamed us into existence, demonstrating that the process of creation—visioning, making, doing—is the most powerful process in the universe. My creation story tells me that collectively we have the intellect and creative power to regenerate our cultures, languages, and nations. My creation story tells me another world is possible, and that I have the tools to vision it and bring it into reality. I can't think of a more powerful narrative.

All of the knowledge that Gzhwe Mnidoo possessed from making every aspect of creation was transferred to us. We can access this vast body of knowledge through our cultures by singing, dancing, fasting, dreaming, visioning, participating in ceremony, apprenticing with elders, practicing our lifeways and living our knowledge by watching, listening, and reflecting in a good way. Ultimately we access this knowledge through the quality of our relationships, and the personalized contexts we collectively create. The meaning comes from the context and the process, not the content.²⁶ In another way, Sákéj Youngblood Henderson says the meaning comes from the performance of our culture.²⁷ Gerald Vizenor says the meaning is in the telling and in the presence, our individual and collective presence—Creation as presence.²⁸ We are all saying the same thing. The performance of our "theories" and thought is how we collectivize meaning. This is important because our collective truths as a nation and as a culture are continuously generated from those individual truths we carry around inside ourselves. Our collective truths exist in a nest of individual diversity.

A little while later in the story, Original Man—or in my case, Betasamosake—goes searching for answers about both the meaning of life and the meaning of her own existence. She finds that for every question she has, Gzhwe Mnidoo has created a story with the answers. She finds that it is her responsibility to discover those stories and seek out the answers. This is our journey through resurgence. This is our responsibility. We are each responsible for finding our own meanings, for shifting those meanings through time and space, for coming to our own meaningful way of being in the world. We are each responsible for being present in our own lives and engaged in our own realities.

Interpreting creation stories within a culturally inherent framework provides several insights into Nishnaabeg thought. First, it is highly personal. All Nishnaabeg people are theorists in the sense that they hold responsibilities to make meaning for their own creation and their own lives. This happens in the context of Nishnaabeg knowledge, their name, their clan, their community, their own personal gifts and attributes, and their own life

experience. Theory is collectivized through the telling of our stories and the performance of our ceremonies. We begin to teach our children theory immediately, and they begin to teach us theory immediately. In part because they are fresh from the spiritual world, with a purity of heart and mind that is difficult to find in adults, but also because they tell it like it is, unaware of whether that is considered "appropriate" or not.

In terms of resurgence, our creation stories tell us that collectively and intellectually we have access to all of the knowledge we need to untangle ourselves from the near destruction we are draped in, because Gzhwe Mni-doo transferred all of her/his thoughts into our full bodies. It tells us that each of us must live in a good and balanced way—physically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually—in order to access this knowledge. For me, it took participating in my own creation story and the creation stories of my children through the ceremonies of pregnancy, birth, and mothering that enabled me to understand the deeper meanings of these theories. These ceremonies in my life were profoundly transformative in all aspects of my being, and yet it took seven years to be able to articulate these meanings from within *debeuwin*, meaning truth.

NOTES

This chapter originally appeared in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (Winnipeg: Arctiter Ring, 2011).

1. The term "Indigenous theory" or "Indigenous thought" is problematic because it reinforces an artificial division between thought and embodiment. For Indigenous peoples, thought is fully integrated into living, being, and performance of our traditions. For a more detailed discussion, see Sákéj Youngblood Henderson's *First Nations Jurisprudence and Aboriginal Rights* (Saskatoon, SK: Native Law Centre, 2006). "Indigenous theory" is lived, not just discussed and actualized in the intellectual realm. I have attempted to use terms from Nishnaabemowin where appropriate.
2. Sákéj Youngblood Henderson, "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 57–77.
3. I have carefully considered the ethical issues around this discussion, and I decided to frame this chapter around published versions (both oral, in the form of public talks and written) of these stories by reputable Nishnaabeg

elders. This means that what is available to widely share is a small fraction of these stories and their meanings. Full understanding only occurs after several years of learning these stories in appropriate oral contexts under the guidance of elders. I have heard the telling of various versions and parts of this creation story over the past fifteen years from a variety of sources, including Robin Greene-ba, Edna Manitowabi, and Doug Williams. Most recently, Jim Dumont told a similar version to the one I am using for my purposes here at the Elders Conference at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario, on February 20, 2010. I have also heard Nishnaabeg educator Nicole Bell retell several aspects of these stories in our local language nest, Wit-Kendiming Nishnaabemowin Saswaansing. I have relied on these oral versions for the purposes of this book, but they are also similar to Benton-Banai's telling in *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (St. Paul, MN: Indian Country Press, 1979).

4. *Aandisoakaan* are traditional, sacred stories. See Wendy Makoons Geniusz, *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, Syracuse NY, 2009), 12.
5. There are both Four Hill and Seven Hill versions of this concept in Nishnaabeg philosophy.
6. N. Bell, E. Conroy, K. Wheatley et al., "Anishinaabe Creation Story," in *The Ways of Knowing Guide* (Toronto: Ways of Knowing Partnership Turtle Island Conservation, Toronto Zoo, 2010), 32, available online at http://torontozoo.travel/pdfs/tic/Stewardship_Guide.pdf. The story present in *The Ways of Knowing Guide* is based on the teachings of the Seven Fires of Creation by Edward Benton-Banai, rendered as a poem entitled "The Seven Fires of the Ojibway Nation," originally published in *The Sounding Voice* (St. Paul, MN: Indian Country Press, 1978), and found in Pamela Williamson and John Roberts, *First Nations Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Emond Montgomery, 2004), 20.
7. Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon, SK: Purich Press, 2007), 100.
8. I use this term in the sense of presence and engagement, rather than a performance that is aimed at entertaining the audience.
9. Basil Johnston, Edward Benton-Banai, Doug Williams, Jim Dumont, Edna Manitowabi, Thomas Peacock, and Marlene Wisuri, who have published these tenets in print form, digital form, or have discussed these tenets in oral forms in public. Following their lead, I do not discuss our creation story further than the boundary they have established.
10. N. Bell, E. Conroy, K. Wheatley et al., "Anishinaabe Creation Story," 25. The story present in *The Ways of Knowing Guide* is based on the Teachings

of the Seven Fires of Creation by Edward Benton-Banai, rendered as a poem entitled "The Seven Fires of the Ojibway Nation," originally published in *The Sounding Voice* (Indian Country Press, 1978), and also found in print in Williamson and Roberts, *First Nations Peoples*, 17–20.

11. This was written by Edna Manitowabi and is printed here with her permission, March 18, 2011, Peterborough, Ontario.
12. *Asinyekwe* means "Rock Woman." Wiwemikong refers to Wikwemikong Unceded Indian Reserve. Mnidoo Minising or "Spirit Island" is the Nishnabeg name for Manitoulin Island, Ontario. *Gaazongii* means Grizzly Bear. *Nakewigiizigokwe* means Half-Day Women.
13. *Oshtk-Nishnabekwe* means "New Woman."
14. *Ogichibita* is a "sacred or holy woman."
15. This is a reference to a visit by Nokomis Giizis, Grandmother Moon, and is a way of talking about a young woman's first menstrual cycle.
16. *Kobaade* means great-grandmother and refers to making a link from one generation to another. We are not to keep the teachings, but to pass them on.
17. There is no gender associated with Gzhwe Mnidoo, and it can be translated as life force, life essence, Creator, the Great Mystery, or "that which we do not understand."
18. I am using the word *theory* here to mean entities, explanations, and engagements that bring about meaning to both the individual and the collective.
19. *Dibaajimowinan* are personal stories, teachings, ordinary stories, narratives, and histories. See Wendy Makoons Geniusz, *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishnabe Teachings* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 12. It is my understanding that there is not a uniform boundary between the two, or that different elders and different regions have specific teachings and protocols around which stories are considered sacred, and which are personal stories, teachings, ordinary stories, narratives, and histories. There is a relationship between the *Aandisokaanan* and *Dibaajimowinan* that to me is like an echo, not a dichotomy.
20. Neal McLeod, *Cree Narrative Memory: From Treaties to Contemporary Times* (Saskatoon, SK: Purich Press, 2007), 98.
21. Doug Williams noted that while the terms "God" or "Creator" might invoke feelings of fear, punishment, or authority, Gzhwe Mnidoo invokes feelings of awe, warmth, love, total acceptance, and protection. Gzhwe Mnidoo is the one who can see you and accepts you completely. Waawshkigagamagki (Curve Lake First Nation), July 15, 2010.
22. This teaching was reaffirmed to me by Jim Dumont, Elders Conference, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, February 20, 2010; and Edna Manitowabi, Guest Lecture INDG 2601, Trent University, September 23, 2010.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. It is my understanding through many conversations with Edna Manitowabi that the story of Original Man and his trip around the earth visiting all aspects of Creation reveals many of our Nishnabeg ways of knowing. Original Man is our first teacher, or first researcher. Original Man learns about the world by engaging with it. He learns by visiting, observing, reflecting, naming, singing, dancing, listening, learning-by-doing, experimentation, consulting with elders, storytelling, and by engaging in ceremony. For a print version of this story, "Original Man Walks the Earth," see pages 6–12 in Edward Benton-Banai, *The Mishomis Book: The Voice of the Ojibway* (Hayward, WI: Indian Country Communications, 1988). Also see Leanne Simpson, "Advancing an Indigenist Agenda: Promoting Indigenous Intellectual Traditions in Research," in *Sacred Landscapes*, ed. Jill Oakes, Rick Riewe, Rachel ten Bruggencate, and Ainsly Cogswell (Winnipeg: Aboriginal Issues Press, University of Manitoba, 2009), 141–54.
26. Leanne Simpson, "The Construction of Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Issues, Implications and Insights" (Ph.D. diss., University of Manitoba, 1999).
27. Sákéj Youngblood Henderson, *First Nations Jurisprudence and Aboriginal Rights* (Saskatoon, SK: Native Law Centre, 2006).
28. Gerald Vizenor and Robert Houle, Pine Tree Lecture, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, February 23, 2010; and Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998).