Growing up as Indigenous Peoples in the North has gifted some unique perspectives for the authors in this textbook. Blake Charles from Stanley Mission (Kisechiwanohk), explains the importance of both storytelling and stories in reinforcing the Cree world view and ways of knowing and being. From Northeastern Siberia, Mariia Iakovleva introduces us to the Sakha (Yakut) version of pimachesowin, *Aiyy Yorege*, making a good life, through the epic tale of *Olonkho* with its foundational concepts for self-determination. Debra Ross, growing up Métis near Green Lake in northwestern Saskatchewan, shares some Métis perspectives of *miyo-pimatisiwin* (living a good life) through her father's stories, and by discussing how this concept's related constituent elements influenced the Métis way of life on the land and the community. The reflections by Josephine McKay from Amisk Osakahikan (Beaver Lake) shed light on modern education and childhood lessons learned from her respected grandfather (*nimosom*), including the phrase "not first time smart," which refers to the values of listening and being mindful. Métis scholar Arlene Hansen from Beauval in northwestern Saskatchewan, writes about celebrating the path of teaching *ahkamimohwin* (resilience) in youth education in northern schools by working in partnership with Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Rosalie Tsannie-Burseth, a noted Dene educator from the Hatchet Lake Denesuline First Nation, introduces Thanadelthur, the Dene heroine legend in Dene oral history and in fur trade journals, and her significance to the northern Dene people. Another educator, Gregory Seib from Deschambault Lake, discusses the importance of a blended economy training approach for Indigenous youth so they fully participate in the economy and ensure they have skills for mitho-pimachesowin, a good livelihood and way of life. Continuing an innovative thread, John Desjarlais from Cumberland House, explores the concept of Indigeneering, engineering through Indigenous Knowledge and *mino-pimachisowin*. He suggests that related Indigenous Knowledge concepts like *wahkohtowin* (relatedness) and *tapwewin* (speaking truth) can help shape and indigenize the engineering profession for mutual benefit, including opening access for Indigenous people and advancing the field of engineering.

In conclusion, it is so important to understand and pay attention to Indigenous concepts like mitho-pimachesowin, not only due to the pressing need for language preservation and restoration, but also to privilege the voices of those making a living on the land and protecting it for future generations. On a broader level, it can also help inform the development of more culturally responsive approaches to the many contemporary issues facing Indigenous self-determination. Many thanks for these wonderful contributions by the northern scholars of both land and university education.

Bonita Beatty

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Exploring the Concept of Mitho Pimachesowin

Unpacking Pimachesowin as a Framing Concept for Indigenous Self-Determination

Eyapachitayak Pimachesowin ta Othastamasoyak Nehithaw tipethimisowin

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Abstract: *Pimachesowin*, the northern Cree term for making your own livelihood or charting your own way of life, is a rich, compact, and difficult term to unpack because it entails all aspects of life and its complex integrated processes (other Indigenous languages have their own equivalent terms). The concept's resilience is sustained by its very complexity and fluidity to change. While Indigenous languages are stronger in the more remote communities, all Indigenous communities are struggling to protect their languages, and essentially their ways of life, against the many external marginalizing influences. This article suggests that pimachesowin (variant spellings include *pimâcihisowin*, *pimâcihowin, pimachihowin, pimachisowin*) with its key elements, can serve as an effective conceptual framework for Indigenous self-determination and, as such, can help inform the development of more culturally responsive approaches to the many issues facing Indigenous self-determination. The key elements include land and resources, spirituality, autonomy (self-rule), livelihood knowledge and skills, hard work ethic, kinship bonds and networks, and cultural values (respect, responsibility, sharing, and resilience). These elements reflect findings of many studies that suggest that, despite numerous challenges, Indigenous Peoples still remain connected to land, livelihood, families and kinship, language, community, spirituality, and cultural values. This article is a chapter in the open textbook *Indigenous Self-Determination through Mitho Pimachesowin (Ability to Make a Good Living)* developed for the University of Saskatchewan course Indigenous Studies 410/810, and hosted by the *Northern Review*.

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Introduction

This article suggests that the Cree term *pimachesowin*[1] (making a living, way of life) makes for a robust framework for better understanding Indigenous self-determination, with its holistic emphasis on land and the Indigenous way of life. The article further suggests that language and stories are valuable conduits through which to unpack Indigenous concepts like pimachesowin. The concept is peripherally explored here, for brevity's sake, through a discussion of some of its more visible elements emerging from studies, stories, and explanations by Elders and community Knowledge Holders. These elements include land and resources, spirituality, autonomy (self-rule), livelihood knowledge and skills, hard work ethic, kinship bonds and networks (*wahkootowin*)[2], and cultural values (respect, responsibility, sharing, and resilience). Each of these elements are concepts themselves, with their own sub-elements that can be further studied. The layout of the article here begins with an introduction, followed by a contextual background, and then a discussion of key elements and related examples; it ends with a few concluding comments.

Indigenous[3] concepts and values of self-determination are embedded in the language. In Woodland Cree, the term pimachesowin refers to making a living, a livelihood, or way of life. The meaning, spelling, and pronunciation can vary somewhat depending on its use and place. In northern Saskatchewan, it normally refers to those making a living on the land, in whole or in part, such as from commercial fishing or trapping. The online Plains Cree dictionary spells it as *pimâcihisowin*, and defines it as "a vocation, that from which one makes a living" (Miyo Wahkohtowin Education Authority, n.d.). Cardinal and Hildebrandt (2000) describe a similar variant *pimacihowin*, "the ability to make a living" (p. 43), and another online Cree dictionary, *itwêwina*, also implies travel, a journey, living, way of life, livelihood and culture (Alberta Language Technology Lab et al., 2022). The key point is that the meanings are similar. It is a comprehensive concept with deeper contextual meanings reflective of time and place. It refers to life processes consisting of many different but related elements. It is about a way of life and has been described as "the central philosophical guide to daily living" (Goulet, 2008, p. 14). It is important to understand Indigenous concepts like pimachesowin, not only due to the pressing need for language preservation and restoration, but also to privilege the voices of those making a living on the land, and to help inform the development of more culturally responsive approaches to the many contemporary issues facing Indigenous self-determination.

The term pimachesowin can be both an action word, a verb (making a living), or noun (livelihood, way of life), but its reference to a dynamic process makes it akin to a journey. The root word is *pimatisiwin* or "life." Pimachesowin is part of the journey of pimatisiwin. It is not just about making a living (in the sense of a job), but rather a way of life imbued with culture, spirituality, homeland, and family identity, all of which remain relevant to this day (Beatty et al., 2013).

As a Woodland Cree speaker from northeastern Saskatchewan, I heard the word pimachesowin in normal day-to-day conversations while growing up, but especially in formal conversations about trapping, fishing, hunting, and other activities related to work and the land-based way of life. There was a confidence and humility that went with the word—"to make your own way of life, to make your own living, to steer your own way, and to be able to take care of yourself and your family."[4] My parents and *nokum* (grandmother) often used it, as well as my aunts and uncles—it seemed everyone used the term. The word was obviously an important concept in our area that gave meaning and purpose to pimatisiwin (life). Little did I know that all of that was for the sake of the children and grandchildren, feeding and looking after them.

The term pimachesowin, in all its dialect variants, is not limited to certain geographical regions, neither is it frozen in time. It is widely applicable. I often heard the term pimacihowin (the ability to make a living) in the context of education during my Cree linguistic classes with the late Dr. Ahab Spence at the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College (now the First Nations University of Canada). Other variations can be found across the country. In the James Bay region, the Cree way of life is described as *Iiyiyiu pimaatisiiwin* (Radu et al., 2014, p. 94) or pimaatisiiwin (Junker et al., 2018). The Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) use *Biimaadiziwin* (way of living) (Bell, 2016, p. 7). It is an old term. Pimacihowin is also found in understandings of First Nations Elders relating to the treaties of Canada (Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 43), a significant reference that conceptually appears to form a key aspect of the treaty–state relationship. Due to the holistic nature of the word, the dialect variations are used interchangeably throughout this article in the discussions of the concept and key elements.

Background and Concepts

What is self-determination? It can be broadly conceptualized as a collective Indigenous right where Indigenous Peoples are able to determine their own lives and futures. It speaks to having control over lands, resources, and self-rule. Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) clearly states that Indigenous Peoples have the right to self-determination, which means they have the right to "freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development" (UNDRIP, 2007). The UNDRIP concept of Indigenous self-determination captures the spirit of the treaties. Cardinal and Hildebrandt (2000) noted that

the perceptions that Saskatchewan Elders held about the treaties focused on issues of the survival and well-being of their children, grandchildren, and future generations, and the need to protect their connectivity to traditional lands and territories—something they saw crucial to the treaty relationship (p. 43). This speaks to ongoing movement toward self-determination, although Canada's federal and provincial governments still have far to go in fulfilling Aboriginal and treaty rights. A 2014 report by James Anaya, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, while acknowledging some positive steps, called on Canada to make more concerted efforts to partner with Indigenous Peoples to work out solutions for addressing the daunting "crisis proportion" issues facing Aboriginal communities, such as poverty, poor living conditions, disparities in health and wellness, abuse of vulnerable women and girls, and the failures to address outstanding treaty and Aboriginal land claims (UN Human Rights Council, 2014, p. 1, 6,).

What are concepts? Concepts are ideas generally framed in words or expressions that can hold meaning for people within a certain context or environment (place, time, scope). Concepts help us see the big picture (the high view) and its constituent parts as a means of knowledge translation or helping to describe something complex. Without getting into philosophical rabbit holes, Burge's (1993) definition of concepts is useful here. He suggests that "concepts are commonly expressed in language. They constitute meanings of the speaker's words" (p. 311). Appreciating that link and exploring Indigenous terms in their context can therefore better inform a broader understanding of Indigenous self-determination. Indigenous world views, while distinct to themselves, all share a holistic concept that all life is interrelated. Pimachesowin (making a livelihood, or way of life) is an example.

I have observed such similarities for many years while teaching students from various regions of the Circumpolar North. The Dene refer to *Ëghëna*, broadly describing "to live" and "to create a good life." Students from northeastern Siberia noted equivalent concepts in the Yakut (Sakha) language. The concept of pimachesowin is not unique to Northern Saskatchewan—indeed, it was identified as pimacihowin in the treaties of Canada (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000). The Anishinaabe refer to *mino-bimaadziwin* as living a good life (Bell, 2016). A growing number of scholars are also using variations of the Indigenous or Aboriginal way of life concept for contextualizing their work. Settee (2017) refers to pimatisiwin life components as Indigenous Knowledge systems and their importance to higher education. Landry, Asselin, and Lévesque (2019) still see a strong link between *mino-pimatisiwin* (comprehensive health) and land in Indigenous urban life in eastern Canada. In all cases, land, family, kinship (wahkootowin), well-being, and traditional values are foundational.

Indigenous languages, with their inherent concepts like pimachesowin, have likewise been marginalized by years of linguistic colonialism by the Canadian state through institutionalization (residential schools, schools in general) and the evolving variations of the Official Languages Act privileging English and French. Other "daunting" challenges include impacts (both positive and negative) from outside influences such as rapid mechanization, transportation, and digital technologies, which all cumulatively impact human societies faster with each generation. There is no waiting around for small and remote communities to catch up. Thankfully, Indigenous languages in Canada have persevered to various extents, but there is real concern that most are at risk. The pressing advocacy for language revitalization is calling for more structural and systemic interventions such as the 2019 federal Indigenous Languages Act, appropriate investments, and culturally appropriate Aboriginal language education programs (TRC, 2015; Assembly of First Nations, 2019).

According to the 2021 Canadian Census, 243,000 people in Canada could conduct a conversation in an Indigenous language, and 189,000 reported their mother tongue was an Indigenous language (Statistics Canada, 2022). There are over seventy Aboriginal languages in Canada, grouped into twelve language families (Statistics Canada, 2017). The Algonquian language family is the most robust and dispersed across the country, with over 175,825 reporting their language belongs to it, namely Cree (largest), Ojibwe (Anishinaabe), Innu/Montagnais, and Oji-Cree (Statistics Canada, 2017). Saskatchewan's Indigenous languages are also fairly strong. There are over seventy-four First Nations communities with the Dene, Woodland Cree, and Swampy Cree to the north and the Plains Cree, Saulteaux, and Nakota/Dakota/Lakota in central and southern Saskatchewan. The Métis reside throughout the province and speak regional variations of Michif, including blends of Cree and French. The Cree language with its five main dialects spread across Canada, also appears most prevalent in Saskatchewan (Ratt, 2016; Napoleon, 2014), along with Dene, which belongs to the Athapaskan language family (Statistics Canada, 2017). The persistent richness of the Indigenous languages in Canada is still evident and they remain excellent sources for a better understanding of Indigenous world views and the values and concepts inherent in the land and way of life.

Unpacking Pimachesowin into Key Elements

Pimachesowin, the northern Cree term for making your own livelihood or your own way of life, is a rich, compact, and difficult term to unpack because it is conceptually rooted in life processes and a world view of self-sufficiency, with its requisite spiritual and material elements. The concept's resilience is sustained by its very complexity and fluidity to change, although it is also always vulnerable

(Beatty et al., 2012). It may seem theoretical but it is by and large immensely practical in the sense of economic and political self-sufficiency. Macdougall, in her seminal study of Métis culture in Sakitawak (Île-à-la-Crosse), Northwestern Saskatchewan, during the 1800s, noted a British fur trader's observation of the people's northern identity that was evident at that time: "notwithstanding the hardships the Natives sometimes suffer, they are strongly attached to the country of rivers, lakes and forests" (Macdougall, 2010, p. 26). That attachment still remains. A 2012 study on northern Aboriginal political culture in Northern Saskatchewan suggested that the northern way of life remains strongly connected to the land, the families, the language, the community, the stories, and the traditional cultural values (Beatty et al., 2012; Beatty et al., 2013).

There is no one way of perfectly describing and defining pimachesowin. Everyone has their way; but here, the concept of pimachesowin is northern and can be visualized like a living tree with its branches comprising elements that are interconnected and rooted to place and environment, yet always changing with time. Here, the discussion will be limited to the low-hanging branches or the more visible elements of the pimachesowin way of life in the North. Key sources for learning about the concept of pimachesowin come from the experiential knowledge of traditional land experts and Elders[5] through their stories, experiences, and lessons learned. Most have strong leadership skills honed from years of struggles in making a living and protecting their lands from outside interests (Beatty et al., 2012). Their stories are valuable conduits for teaching concepts about their way of life. Elders and community people are also sometimes referred to as Traditional Knowledge Holders by researchers in various studies, and while that is positive, they are obviously more than that. Elders are respected family members with extensive kinship (wahkootowin) networks, and with knowledge and expertise earned through life experiences. The phrase "way of life" is commonly used to describe pimachesowin, but it is not easy to define properly because it is about process. In the North, Indigenous ways of life are often described in terms associated with working on the land. Fortunately, Indigenous scholars and others are creating more partnerships with communities thus privileging their knowledge and producing good translation work with Elders and community people.

Acimowina (stories told) can often contain a blend of all the pimachesowin elements in one story. In that sense, they are more than stories. For example, land, self-sufficiency, hard work, kinship (wahkootowin), responsibility, and resilience are all illustrated in the stories of Elders in a 1987 publication of the Northwest Territories (NWT) Fort Resolution Education Authority study. One Elder described their way of life in this way:

> JG. We used to travel all over the bush with my dad. My mom and I stayed home when my dad went out to hunt, fish or trap. My dad used to kill a lot of moose, so we used to have meat all the time. We lived good with meat in those days. (Fort Resolution Education Authority, 1987, p. 4)

Here we get a picture. The geographical location was in remote, far northern Canada. The family household was self-sufficient through the bush skills and hard work of the parents or care providers. The social and economic foundation reflected a common northern blended economy, consisting of land-based subsistence activities (hunting), local industry income (fishing, trapping), and community "home" supports. It was obviously a tough life with its vulnerabilities but, from a child's perspective in this example, it was a good, safe life.

Most Indigenous stories share common themes such as the concepts of the land and environment shaping cultures, languages, and ways of life of Indigenous Peoples over generations. One of the challenges with acimowina research is that it is never easy, even for fluent speakers, to do proper knowledge translation of Indigenous terms and phrases. Much time and care are needed to avoid potential misinterpretations and wrong conclusions, yet once the translation is done, we find that the stories remain relevant. Some studies that have done this include the following (and there are many more):

- *An oral history of the Fort Resolution Elders. That's the way we lived* (Fort Resolution Education Authority, 1987)
- *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our dream is that our peoples will one day be clearly recognized as nations* (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000)
- *One of the family: Métis culture in nineteenth-century Northwestern Saskatchewan* (Macdougall, 2010).

A discussion of these examples below shows some common threads or elements relevant to self-determination or pimachesowin—making a living, a way of life. These include, among others, land and resources, spirituality, autonomy (self-rule), livelihood knowledge and skills, hard work ethic, kinship bonds and network (wahkootowin), and cultural values (respect, responsibility, sharing, and resilience). It is also always important to get an understanding of the geography and background of where people are from in order to better appreciate their world views, as the following studies attest.

That's the Way We Lived: An Oral History of the Fort Resolution Elders

A brief history of the region helps set some context for the Northwest Territories Fort Resolution Education Authority study, *That's the Way We Lived: An Oral History of the Fort Resolution Elders* (Fort Resolution Education Authority [FRE], 1987).Colonialism came to the Great Slave Lake region by way of the fur trade that was largely dominated by the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), especially after its 1821 merger with the Northwest Company. Fort Resolution was its main post on the lake and it is now the oldest continuously occupied settlement in the Northwest Territories (Canada's Historic Places, n.d.). The region has diverse Indigenous languages. The Northwest Territories government recognizes eleven official languages in the territory, including five Dene (Athabaskan), three Inuit, one Cree, and two Indo-European (English, French) (GNWT, 2021).

The oral history project undertaken by the Fort Resolution Education Authority interviewed seventeen Dene Elders living in Fort Resolution. The findings were translated in a book describing the "way of life" of the northern Dene in the Great Slave Lake region of the Northwest Territories (Fort Resolution Education Authority, 1987). A map (traditional lands) and genealogy (family trees) were used to depict historical family networks and kinship systems. Personal stories, mostly in Dene, recorded the memories and thoughts of the Elders explaining their kinship connections and traditional ways of life that included hunting, trapping, and fishing. It was a way of life that took team effort and most people had large extended families. The stories gathered in the study contain some important thematic concepts of the traditional way of life, as the following quotes illustrate:

> I was born on April 21st, 1917, in Rat River. My grandfather raised me. (JJ quoted in Fort Resolution Education Authority, 1987, p. 4)

> In the old days, we had to travel to find food all the time. (MLK quoted in Fort Resolution Education Authority, 1987, p. 5)

> In the old days, the young people were taught by the old people. The old people would show them how to set traps, make a fire, boil tea and all that. The old person would sit there and let the kid do it. That's the way the kids used to learn. While they were out in the bush, they would teach kids about directions as well. That is how I learned to travel. I travelled a lot with the old people. If I go out on the lake and a storm comes up, I know what to do. (HB quoted in Fort Resolution Education Authority, 1987, p. 9)

> In the old days when they built a house, there was a man with an axe at every corner. (VB quoted in Fort Resolution Education Authority, 1987, p. 9)

> It wasn't easy to make your living before. You had to do a lot of work to make a living. After I was old enough to work, I worked all the time and I worked hard. (JG quoted in Fort Resolution Education Authority 1987, p. 10)

> We trapped all winter and when summer came, we fished. That's how we made our living … The people used to look after each other and look after each other good …. We never rested. We always had something to do – traveling, hunting, trapping – we had work to do all the time. We had to fix our fish nets too. After all the work was done, the people would gather together in the evening and the older people would tell stories. We used to listen real good to those older people telling stories. That's what we would do for fun. (NY quoted in Fort Resolution Education Authority, 1987, p. 11)

The Fort Resolution Education Authority study of Elder acimowina (stories) proved invaluable not only as ethnohistory for the families and community, but it later helped inform the traditional land use and environmental impact assessments that First Nations needed in order to negotiate with governments and industry over mining and hydropower development projects on their lands. For example, the Fort Resolution study was referenced in a 2013 report to the British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority (BC Hydro) relating to a clean hydro energy project in the Fort Resolution area (Big Sky Consulting, 2013). Furthermore, Indigenous land claims and resources agreements are still being settled in the region with many continuing concerns over the sustainability of the Dene way of life and livelihood. The Akaitcho Dene First Nations, for example, resilient through many years of negotiations with federal and territorial governments, are finally working towards an agreement in principle, although they have been delayed by many things including COVID-19 (Brockman, 2020). Protecting their lands and way of life priorities dominate their agenda. This was echoed in the Deninu K'ue First Nation Traditional Land Use Baseline and Assessment Amendment Report where it was concluded that hunting, trapping, and fishing activities on the land still provided for the essential social and economic needs of the Dene families and, as such, successfully demonstrated their continued use of their traditional lands (Big Sky Consulting, 2013, p. 136).

Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream is that our Peoples Will One Day be Clearly Recognized as Nations

The *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan* book (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000) is an excellent source of information for better understanding pimacihowin as an integral concept of self-determination and life (pimatisiwin). The authors conducted a study across Saskatchewan, gathering the ideas, perspectives, and understandings of First Nations Elders on treaties. The study was supported by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN)[6] and the governments of Canada and Saskatchewan, along with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner. Cardinal and Hildebrandt held extensive forums in all the languages across the province with translators working with the Cree, Saulteaux, Dene, and Assiniboine Elders. The book privileged the voices of the Elders thereby ensuring the knowledge remains relevant. The Elders were actively engaged to ensure that the First Nations concepts were properly interpreted (p. ix) and understood in the context of their spiritual foundations, traditions, and laws (p. 1). The authors noted that knowledge translation was often complex and complicated (p. ix), thus an attribute to be respected in research.

Land and pimacihowin were seen as fundamental elements of life (pimatisiwin) with all its spiritual and material elements. Essentially, Elders wanted to ensure a good future for their children and grandchildren and treaties were seen as a fundamental means for that. They also wanted First Nations people to re-assert their connections to their traditional lands and territories (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 43). The authors suggest that the concept of pimacihowin—way of life, making a living, livelihood—is a treaty right. Pimacihowin is connected to land and is in itself a fundamental element of pimatisiwin (life), a concept containing physical, spiritual, and economic elements. Land is a source of life and well-being. This world view of connectedness in all things is seen as one of the guarantees in the treaties. The concept of pimacihowin also has structure and a system of rules. According to Cardinal and Hildebrandt:

> when treaty Elders use the word "pimacihowin," they are describing a holistic concept that includes a spiritual as well as physical dimension. It is an integral component of traditional First Nations doctrines, laws, principles, values and teachings regarding the sources of life, the responsibilities associated with them, including those elements seen as necessary for enhancing the spiritual components of life and those associated with making a living. (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 43)

The concept of pimacihowin was contextualized further by the Elders, and a few sample quotes below illustrate the importance of its spiritual and material aspects, and its connection to land, which the Elders believed were inalienable treaty rights.

> We were able to look after ourselves through the use of these gifts that God gave us, our ability to feed ourselves and look after our children. We were proud of ourselves because we took care of ourselves, we had the animals to hunt, we had the food God put on the land, the berries and the medicines that we carried out and that we go out and gather. (Elder Dolly Neapetung, quoted in Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, pp. 43, 44)

> What we do know is there's two important things: lands and resources and we knew that we knew what the land meant to us, we knew what the wildlife meant to us … our land, our way of life, would always be protected, would always be there, is what I have for information from my mother. (Elder Bart Dzeylion, quoted in Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 44)

> The treaties, they are not finished yet. They are not finished, like the 1930 transfer agreement that should never take place, because we only gave a tip of a plough at this country … (Elder Gordon Oakes, Treaty 4, quoted in Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 63)

> Like Gordon [Oakes] said, the depth of a plough. That was the only part that they let them use. Other than that, below the depth of a plough was supposed to be negotiated after like he said, but it never was … we did not give up the land, we did not sell the land. (Elder Jimmy Myo Treaty 6, quoted in Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 63)

Pimacihowin is both a personal and collective "we" concept. Cardinal and Hildebrandt (2000) mention many teachings, *kakeskihkemowina*, on codes of personal behaviour[7] in pimacihowin (p. 45), including respect and self-sufficiency, *tipiyawewisowin* (p. 44). The fulfilment of the pimacihowin arrangements in the treaties (land and resources) were seen as vital for maintaining connection to the land, ensuring a way of life for the future, and reconciliation of the treaty relationship with Canada (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 43–46). According to the authors, the good "way of life" envisioned by the treaties was through economic self-sufficiency so First Nations people could continue to have the ability to make a living on their lands with their families, freely and independently (p. 61).

One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan

Another book that privileges the Indigenous voice and world view is *One of the Family: Métis Culture in Nineteenth-Century Northwestern Saskatchewan,* based on Brenda Macdougall's genealogical study of Métis family systems, culture, and relationships in nineteenth-century northwestern Saskatchewan (Macdougall, 2010). The Cree concept of wahkootowin (family, relatedness) is foundational to the Métis perspective and it was used as a framework to guide the genealogical study, with a focus on the community of Sakitawak (Ile-a-la Crosse) (p. 7, 8). Indigenous world views are embedded in languages, and in this case Cree was dominant in the area. Macdougall noted the term could not be found in the historical documents because it was rooted in an Indigenous world view that came from "ceremonies, prayer and daily conversation" (p. xii), something she learned from Métis Elders.

Wahkootowin was used to better understand behaviours in their environmental contexts. The term is fundamentally about Cree family systems, spirituality, relationships, and life on the land, which for most northern Indigenous people was always challenged by many factors, including the fur trade, churches, and their impacts. Nonetheless, the Aboriginal people of the area (Métis, Dene, Cree) still had autonomy and, as the author notes, were able to go about their daily lives (Macdougall, 2010, p. xii). The genealogical study acknowledges an extensive network of relatedness and cultural similarities among the Aboriginal families (p. 71), including inter-family adoptions (p. 82). Wahkootowin in action was understood to be a flexible and inclusive family system. According to Macdougall (2010), wahkootowin in the region was "an inclusive, holistic philosophy, predicated upon real stricture – being a good relative, which required adherence to the values, protocols, and behaviours expected of family members" (p. 83). The holistic nature of Wahkootowin is also described as a reference, not only to family systems but also to the spiritual relatedness to the Creator God and all living things. And while Catholicism played a dominant role in Métis life, Macdougall suggests that the understanding of Wahkootowin had "a basic compatibility between many of the Indian and Catholic religious concepts" (2010, p. 136). She describes wahkootowin as "part of a religious system that drew the land, creatures and people together as spiritual relatives with all creation and, therefore, included spirit beings as part of the extended family" (2010, p. 132).

It is also evident in Macdougall's study that the values of wahkootowin (relatedness) continue to influence the Indigenous people of northwestern Saskatchewan. A quote by a Dene Elder illustrates this resilient strength:

> I speak Cree too, that's where I leaned it, in Clear Lake. I'm a Dene but we all live together. Nowadays they say Half-breed, Treaty and non-Treaties. In Clear Lake, we all live together and there was no such thing. We were like one family. If they shot a moose, everybody got a piece of the meat, they don't take it to their homes and put it away like we do now and dump it in the deep freeze. And they don't feed nobody. In those days everybody shared, everybody had a piece of meat out of that moose. There was no such thing as Treaty or non-Treaty them days. (Macdougall, 2010, p. 247)

The complexity of the genealogical work, going through archives and myriad other sources, gives credence to the continuing value of the study. It helps provide a deeper understanding the historical Métis way of life, family, and wahkootowin culture and networks that existed then and still do in the Sakitawak region. It also shows that the concept of wahkootowin continues to prevail notwithstanding the many changes resulting from outside challenges. Today, the resilient Métis way of life is evidenced by the continuing developments in Sakitawak. The village's website points to an extensive history in the fur trade with its claim as the second oldest community in Saskatchewan (1778) next to Cumberland House, another former fur trading post. After the 1821 merger of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Northwest Company, Ile-a-la Crosse became the base of the HBC due to its strategic location, as reflected in its Cree name Sakitawak, "where the rivers meet." Among some of its notable historical details, it is also the birthplace of Louis Riel Sr., father of the famed Métis leader Louis Riel (The Northern Village of Ile-a-La Crosse, 2020).

Concluding Comments

The above are good examples of studies, stories, and lessons derived from language and ways of life on the land. They illustrate many of the common threads of world views shared by Indigenous Peoples relevant to pimatsiwin (life). The key concepts of pimachesowin (making a living, a way of life), for example, are well illustrated in the Elders' stories. Pimachesowin in action consists of the related holistic concepts of land and resources, spirituality, autonomy (self-sufficiency), livelihood knowledge and skills, hard work ethic, kinship bonds and networks (wahkootowin), and cultural values (respect, responsibility, sharing, and resilience).

The wahkootowin concept in Cardinal and Hildebrandt's study encapsulates what the Elders understood to be the nature of the treaty relationship with Canada, with its codes of conduct for guiding that relationship (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 34). The concept was no less significant for the Métis way of life on their

lands in the Sakitawak study, where wahkootowin values shaped Métis family systems and their relations with each other, and with others (Macdougall, 2010). The Fort Resolution Education Authority study (1987) likewise displays similar wahkootowin values in Dene family social structures and ways of life through the stories told by the Elders about their history, such as Elders teaching children the skills of the land and values promoting sharing and people helping each other.

In conclusion, pimachesowin is a concept that essentially refers to a holistic self-sustaining life process and strategic focus that is both spiritual and bluntly practical. The framework detail is in the concept's elements that were peripherally explored here. It is all about both self and collective autonomy and the wherewithal to steer life in a good way, which essentially comprises Indigenous self-determination. One element that is often not considered is the sacrifice and hardships faced by Indigenous people in pimachesowin or making a living for their families. Some of the Elders in the studies mentioned that making a living was hard (Fort Resolution Educational Authority, 1987); nonetheless, being out on the land and being supported by family and others (wahkootowin) made it worthwhile.

I recall my own late grandmother often teased us with the term, *ayiman* (it is hard), and it was used in the context of persuading us children to wake up to go to school, since some of us would stay with her when our parents went to the trapline in the spring. It was her way of telling us she understood it was hard to get up to go to school (but too bad). It was a teasing remark, but it still reminds us today to have faith and not to quit when things get tough—a resilience necessary for pimachesowin. We never forgot her nor her lessons in later life, and it is undoubtedly the same for many others with their family Elders. The respected late Senator Allan Bird from the Montreal Lake First Nation said it best in Cardinal and Hildebrandt's study of Elders' treaty perspectives: "we are here for a very important reason; it is for our grandchildren so that they may have a good future" (p. 71).

Notes

1. Note that the spelling of pimachesowin is used here to simply illustrate the "ch" sound in English. In Cree Standard Roman Orthography (SRO), the spelling is pimacesowin or pimacihisowin where "c" represents the "ch" sound. As well, "e" is used rather than "i" to denote the long "e" sound used in the North.
2. Variant spellings include wâhkôhtowin and wahkohtowin.
3. Indigenous and Aboriginal are used interchangeably here in the Canadian context. The term Indigenous adopts an international reference often used by scholars and governments. The term Aboriginal is defined in the Canadian Constitution Act, 1982, s. 35(2) and specifically refers to "the Indian, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada."
4. From the author's personal memories.
5. The term "Elders" is broadly used in this article in the context of greater age and experience. The term is also used in other contexts such as having special skills and roles in traditional ceremonies.
6. FSIN is now called the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations.
7. A list of the behavioural codes of conduct are listed as examples in Cardinal and Hildebrandt (2007, p. 45).

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