Yakama Women at the Longhouse

Huli-Carried Medicine and Traditional First Food Ceremonies, Part 2

By Hailey Allen

ABSTRACT

This paper examines Indigenous epistemologies grounded in relationality, lived knowledge, and spiritual connections to land within Yakama communities. Building on prior research, it explores Yakama women's traditional ecological knowledge through elder interviews and participation in Longhouse (Washat) and First Foods practices. These traditions reflect a worldview that honors natural elements as living forces and emphasizes women's roles in stewardship and knowledge transmission. Focusing on berry-picking practices and the Huckleberry Feast, this study highlights how women sustain and adapt cultural traditions. The findings underscore the resilience of Indigenous knowledge systems and their importance in maintaining reciprocal relationships with land and community.

Keywords: Indigenous epistemologies, Yakama, relationality, traditional ecological knowledge, Indigenous women

Introduction

Indigenous epistemologies center the spiritual bond to land and are rooted in relationality and lived knowledge, intimately linked to place-based ethics. This respect for and vantage point on the land and ecosystem are evident among the Yakama, who, like many Indigenous peoples, honor elements such as wind, rain, fire, and water as living forces. This paper is a continuation of my first project, in which I centered my approach on lived knowledge, anchored in relationality and situated within place-based ethical frameworks. My ethnographic exploration has followed Yakama women's traditional medicine through elder interviews and engagement with the Longhouse religion (Washat) and First Foods ceremonial practices, where women demonstrate their role in stewarding the land and carrying forward and adapting traditional knowledge. This resilience is embodied in practices such as berry-picking and root-digging. In this second paper, I continue this fieldwork, focusing on additional berry-picking practices and examining the dimensions of the Longhouse, including the role of women as expressed through the Huckleberry Feast.

It is from this foundation that I analyze *Hulí*—the wind—as a conceptual framework, viewing the principles as a living force that represents continuity, movement, resilience, nourishment,

and the relational transmission of embodied knowing. *Hulí* embodies knowledge as vitality, sustaining cultural resilience through intergenerational teachings and ecological stewardship. Through Yakama legends, ceremonies, and oral history, I show how *Hulí* propels the flow of knowledge and healing as a form of resistance to colonial disruption, highlighting Yakama women as critical bearers of resilience. I frame this theoretical framework within broader scholarship by engaging Indigenous and decolonial feminist theories that ground my analytical lens and inspire my work.

Drawing on Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's articulation of *Nibi* (water) as both relative and teacher, where the land guides us in living with one another and in the resurgence and reclamation of world-making in harmonious and generative ways, I extend her concept of land as pedagogy to inform my own engagement with *Hulí*.[1]

Using Water as a framework for understanding how our relations extend beyond our immediate or individual needs, compelling us to imagine beyond the present moment and to consider the larger systems that interact to sustain life on Earth. The living theory of water illustrates the circulating movement of exchange and renewal on a planetary scale, taking different forms and occupying space, revealing the profound interdependence and adaptive capacity of all beings and ecosystems. Through this lens, we can recognize ourselves as part of that global web of connection, offering a relational model of planetary intelligence, one understood not as a future possibility, but as an active and enduring reality.

Carried by Huli: Positionality, Methods, and Relational Ethics

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's work provides a framework for my approach. She examines the theory of water, in her language, Anishinaabemowin, *Nibi*. Thinking within an Indigenous framework alongside water and its various forms, we uncover a paradigm for living, organizing, and world-building beyond colonialism and racial capitalism. The concept of Nibi conveys a global, cyclical, and permeable force that models rebirth, interdependence, decentralization, and resilience. It illuminates how water cycles link the spheres of the familial, local, and land with broader global scales of nations and movements, uncovering fractals—patterns that recur across dimensions.

This conceptual grounding brought me to a place of remembering, an urge to rekindle my relationship with wind, not as a metaphor borrowed from another element, but as a distinct force with its own teachings. In Sahaptin, the word for wind is *Hulí*, a concept that holds deep personal significance and guides my engagement with Indigenous knowledge, ceremony, and relational practices. Anchored in the metaphor of *Hulí*–the wind–I seek to reveal the cyclical

[1] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Theory of Water: Nishnaabe Maps to the Times Ahead* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2025), 1.

and interrelated nature of Indigenous ways of knowing and the transmission of knowledge.

Wind signifies strength, freedom, but also change and uncertainty. Wild and uncontrollable, just as the colonial-settlers described the "haughty Yakama women."[2] One cannot contain forces intended to disrupt structures that uphold systems of oppression and hierarchy. Within the entrenched frameworks of capitalism in which we currently operate, I aim to challenge these systems—those that harm humanity, the caretakers of the Earth, and Mother Earth herself—through publication and written expression. *Hulí* carries the seeds of new ideas and theories, dispersed in patterns that may appear chaotic but ultimately follow a larger, coherent design.

Attunement to the wind requires stillness and openness of the heart; its messages are not transmitted acoustically but relationally. The wind teaches through the heart, not through the ears. The wind carries more than air; it carries pollen, seeds, moisture, heat—it carries language, stories, prayers, and messages. It propels change, provokes movement, and cannot be captured or controlled. In my own life, wind is medicine, especially when I run. Running connects me to the Creator, the land, my ancestors, and the earth herself. The wind restrains me, replenishes me, and reminds me that I am not separate from these cycles. I am in relationship with the wind, just as I am in relationship with land and water.

Before presenting my findings, I position myself and clarify the lens through which I explore women's traditional medicine. I am a mixed Indigenous woman, a descendant of the Yakama and Umatilla tribes, with Jewish and African American heritage. I am studying the role of women in the Longhouse within the Yakama community, a group to which I belong and where I have grown up participating and learning. I come to this research with both personal ties and some formal academic training, yet I recognize that the elders I have interviewed and followed during ceremony carry a depth of wisdom and embodied knowledge far exceeding what I could have learned in any academic setting. Their lived experience and teachings are rooted in generations of oral traditions and practices, guided by their own knowledgeable elders. What I offer here is only a glimpse of the knowledge entrusted to me. I am by no means an expert on Indigenous or Yakama culture. Additionally, practices and teachings vary across regions, bands, families, and generations. I humbly acknowledge that I am still learning and am deeply grateful for the opportunities to learn. This research incorporates personal narrative and fieldwork, including berry picking and attending a Longhouse First Foods Ceremony, the Huckleberry Feast. My methodological approach centers Indigenous frameworks that understand knowledge as generated through embodied practice and relational participation.[3,4] This

[2] Michelle M. Jacob, *Yakama Rising: Indigenous Cultural Revitalization, Activism, and Healing* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2014), 90.

[3] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 114-118.

[4] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 70.

positioning draws on scholarship that recognizes women's traditional medicine as a land-based practice functioning as a site of epidemiological transmission, one that strengthens cultural resilience while supporting environmental, individual, and community health.[5,6] Indigenous theory reflects the multiplicity of generative knowledge and embodied knowing, which can be contradictory and formless yet guided by logics that illuminate the organization of our ways of being and knowing.

Wíwnu (Huckleberries) Gathering on Sawtooth Ridge

We spent the weekend in the mountains, renewing our ties with our animal, plant, and elemental relatives, bathing in Mount Lake Adams, feeling the *Hulí* breeze, and sharing meals and stories around the campfire. We traveled to Trout Lake to harvest huckleberries at Sawtooth Ridge. Before arriving at our picking spot, we convened with the Longhouse picking group in Glenwood, a small rural town nestled in the foothills of the Cascade mountains just beyond the Yakama reservation. Our group comprised six vehicles, carrying Yakama women and children en route to harvest huckleberries for the Longhouse.

Upon arrival, we engaged in a brief prayer and song before commencing the gathering. We had a group of new pickers this year, older women, the same age as me, and their children. I was given a jar of delicious wild salmon and a pack of crackers from one of the lead women for coming along and joining them. She described her partner as a fisherman and a river native, and herself as from the valley, both deeply immersed in their duties within the culture. Her daughter, a toddler, was present with us both days. She had spent the whole season planting and spending time outdoors with her mama. She was at ease in nature, and I commented on how in love she was with the land. It was incredibly sweet watching her run around and jump in the little puddles along the dirt path that we had come in on, giggling and prancing amongst the huckleberry bushes.

One of the women, who was also picking for the first time, brought enough lunch for everyone in a crockpot. At home, she had prepared chicken, rice, and vegetables. It was delicious, and my daughter unexpectedly got to have a hot lunch she absolutely loved. This thoughtful act of generosity highlighted how everyday sharing reinforces kinship ties and deepens the communal dimensions of seasonal food gathering, affirming responsibilities carried with care.

Tmáani (picking berries, harvesting fruit) embodies Yakama knowledge and culture as it flows across generations, sustained within the relational rhythms of the land, plants, and community.

Every small act of the process—whether holding the first berry, sharing a meal with the group, or singing in Ichishkiin—reflects the deep connection between all relatives: land, humans,

[5] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 118.

[6] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 48.

and animals. Through these relationships, the generative force of *Hulí* travels through the landscape, carrying teachings and prayers with intention, linking humans, animals, land, and the elements within a dynamic network of ecological and cultural interdependence.

Figure 1
On the Left: Ava Lien Wíwnu picking at Trout Lake. Photo taken by Hailey Allen.
On the Right: Ava Lien and I at Mount Adams Lake. Photo taken by Farley Allen.

Figure 2
Wíwnu (Huckleberries) at Clear Creek. Photo taken by Hailey Allen.

Tmaanitnan Kq'uyt (Huckleberry Feast)

Women on the berry-picking line wear a special basket hat, the "patl'aapá," which symbolizes their role in this sacred part of the ceremony. My great-aunt lent me her beautiful, beaded patl'aapá for my first ceremony and brought another, decorated with horses, for my daughter to borrow.

My Alá is the lead of the women's line at the Longhouse. She oversees the women, keeping the line in order, and orchestrating the sequence of ceremonial protocols. We have a strict order for the entire process, and some Longhouses do not follow the traditional ways as strictly as we do, but I was told that, when my grandfather (great-uncle) ran the services, he wanted them to abide by the traditional ways as strictly as possible. This

Figure 3

Wearing our patl'aapá (basket hat). On the Left: Ava Lien. Photo taken by Farley Allen.
On the Right: My Alá (Paternal Grandma) and I at the Huckleberry Feast. Photo taken by Farley Allen.

desire for strict adherence is part of the traditions and the specific instructions given to the Yakama people to continue receiving blessings from the land and Creator and to live in harmony with all beings. Tasks must be executed with precision, as meticulousness is integral to the practice.

Figure 4
First Foods. Huckleberry Feast Wapato Longhouse, 2025. Photos taken by Hailey Allen.

Before we enter the Longhouse, go into ceremony, or perform a prayer or act of service—such as serving traditional foods—we start by raising our right hand and turning counterclockwise. My father explained that he learned this from my atwai, late great-uncle Russell; the turning ensures each person is recognized and counted. Each of our actions, such as entering or praying, has a specific song (prayer) assigned to it. For example, before we serve food, we sing a song in honor of the berries or the salmon, depending on the feast.

This year, my daughter and I had the privilege of serving on the serving line, with my Alá guiding the women with the sound of her bell. Each time we delivered food to the tule mats, Alá would ring her bell, signaling us to turn around and circle the wash before serving the dishes. The older women held one dish in each hand, and the young women at the end of the line held one, reflecting collaboration and the sharing of responsibilities. After circling the entire Longhouse, we delivered the traditional foods from the oldest woman to the youngest. We began on the far-right side of

Figure 4
Ka'uytmí tkwátat (First Foods Ceremony Foods). From Right to left Waykáanash (Salmon), Yáamash (deer), Piyaxí (bitterroot), Sicáwya (Root), Sawict (Indian Carrot), Chcháya (Juneberry), tmísh (chokecherries), wíwnu (huckleberry). White Swan Community Center Huckleberry Feast. Photo taken by Farley Allen.

the Longhouse, the men's side. Traditionally, only men sat there during the service, but now this is mostly observed just for the service; during the meal, women may sit on the men's side, and men may sit on the women's side.

Figure 5
Tmaanitnan Kq'uyt (Huckleberry Feast), White Swan Community Center Longhouse. Lucei, Allen, Pachpe, Lien, and Palmer family. Photo taken by Jared Swan.

It is customary to give away your first picking, along with the first kill, for young men when they get their first elk or deer. The Yakama way of gifting is to ensure that gratitude is not simply a feeling but a deliberate action that reflects respect, responsibility, and connection.

Gifts are a central element of Yakama ways.

> *A main teaching within traditional culture is that one must acknowledge that receiving a gift is an honor, and that one must be respectful of both the gifts received and the gift giver, who is honoring the one receiving the gift. Gifts serve an important function within Yakama culture. They bring relations together in a cycle of reciprocity.*[7]

In Yakama tradition, the gifting of one's first berries is offered to an elder as an expression of gratitude, respect, and recognition of community interconnectedness. In our family, my daughter presented her first gathering to her Kathlah, my stepmother Martina, while I offered mine to my Alá, Carol. This first giveaway represents participation in the cycle of reciprocity that sustains Yakama cultural teachings. Ava approached the act with pride, reflecting a character in which generosity and intentional giving are deeply ingrained. Through drawing, writing personalized notes, or gathering wildflowers and fruit, she demonstrates the joy and meaning inherent in honoring others and nurturing relationships through mindful giving.

Echoes on the Huli: Literature Review

Through my immersion with the land, elders, and ceremonial participation, I have deepened my understanding of Hulí's living force through an embodied personal memory and collective resilience. To contextualize these experiences within scholarly discourse, I now review the literature exploring Indigenous epistemologies through the role of women in traditional healing, touching on the significance of the metaphorical symbolism of relationality and continuity in Hulí.

[7] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 27.

Theory of Water

In the theory of water, Simpson invites us to think alongside *Nibi* (water), moving beyond our immediate needs to engage with uncertainty, multiplicity, adaptation, and iteration as guiding principles for sustaining and nurturing a relational, co-created Indigenous existence. It demonstrates how relational practices generate continuity and abundance, and, through the embodied continuous renewal, inspires us to imagine futures that reject extractive logic and cultivate interdependence and abundance that uphold the vitality of all beings, extending beyond immediate human needs.

Inspired by *Nibi* as a theoretical framing, Hulí parallels water in its capacity to transmit knowledge. Like water that flows, adapts, and changes form with its surroundings, *Hulí* embodies the dynamic exchange of ideas and teachings across generations, anchoring our identities to one another while allowing them to move, shift, and respond to the world around us. This connection illuminates how knowledge is not merely shared but also transformed and carried forth, much like the constant movement of air. *Hulí* embodies the fluidity, interconnectedness, and relational understanding of Indigenous frameworks, emphasizing the importance of transmitting wisdom through relation.

By observing water and its cycles, we can learn from its strength and transformation. The biological process of sintering, in which ice or snow gradually bonds through repeated melting and refreezing at grain contact points, forms denser, more resilient structures over time.[8] Sintering demonstrates Indigenous co-resistance and provides a multidimensional perspective of how Indigenous ways of knowing and being endure, adapt, transform, and strengthen without requiring rigid conformity.

This relational resistance highlights the interconnected elements of teachings, ceremonies, and land-based practices that maintain cohesion across space and time while preserving their distinctiveness.[9] This model allows us to witness the interdependence and continuity that sustains Indigenous life and culture despite colonial pressures to assimilate. The practices are regenerated through adaptation, flow, and renewal in response to the changing contexts. It shows the strength that emerges from connection, flexibility, and persistence.*Hulí*, too, carries profound biological and ecological teachings. The generation and renewal of life across landscapes occur through *Hulí's* dispersal of seeds, pollen, and spores. It moves nutrients, shapes climates, and initiates and propels cycles of growth, decay, and regeneration. In this way, Hulí models a form of relational cohesion in motion that connects the plants, animals, water, and land.

Wind is how medicine travels and flows to the next generation, plant, or prayer. It is the carrier, the breath of the story, the song's pulse, the whisper of teachings passed between a

[8] Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 34.

[9] Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 34.

grandmother's hand and a child's fingers, digging up roots. In an interview, my stepmother, a Yakama elder, reflected on the role of wind as a messenger.

She explained, *"The wind can whisper things to you, and it is up to you whether you choose to listen. But you should always pay attention to what your surroundings are telling you—that is how I understand it."*

These two theories of wind and water demonstrate the motion and relationality of Indigenous epistemology: medicine is not held—instead, it is moved, carried, and shared. The body is not a container of knowledge but a vessel of movement, a participant in the dancing of water and wind. The longhouse, the land, and the child with dirt-covered fingers from gathering roots all become sites of transmission where medicine is received not only through teaching but through experience, feeling, living, and dreaming. And in these experiences, we enact and embody the transformative, nourishing, interrelational, entwined, enduring, and cyclical ways of being.[10] The relational understanding of knowledge as movement rather than possession is further theorized through Simpson's articulation of *Nibi*, where water functions as a living analytic that reorients scale, temporality, and responsibility:

> "The theory of Nibi [Water] asks us to think on a scale that is outside the present moment and our own immediate needs. I'm thinking about Nibi as a theory here because Nibi offers us an invitation to learn from its embodied practice, a practice of cycling that is global, permeable, and brings about a continuous rebirth on our planet."[11]

Storytelling and origin stories carry the foundational components of existence and history through a multiplicity of origins. They function as more than narratives and operate as theories in motion. The teachings that emerge from embodied and relational practice travel across time and space, spanning generations, communities, and lands.[12]

Storytelling in this context is not separate from life; rather, it is the way that we learn how to be in good relationship with one another. We don't just tell stories—we live them. And oral stories have the capacity to dynamically shift, existing and adapting in places such as the Longhouse, where women carry and transmit these teachings, these stories becoming the pedagogy and practice.

The transmission of Indigenous knowledge is grounded in experiences, observations, and practices that have been relayed through metaphorical teachings and intergenerational transmission. This way of knowing is intrinsically linked to modes of perception, cognition, and behavior that sustain life. Such knowledge is rooted in a deep understanding and reverence for the natural environment and "emerges from a lived, storied participation with the landscape

[10] Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 40.

[11] Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 17.

[12] Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 21.

that includes sensation, perception, imagination, logic, reason, emotion, symbols, spirit, and soul." This way of being recognizes the importance of life's spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions.

Yakama Rising

In her work, *Yakama Rising*, Dr. Michelle M. Jacob reinforces the thread integral to Yakama traditions, with women holding the incredibly important position of wisdom keepers and transmitters of knowledge—responsible for the historical practice of preservation and for embodied knowledge—emphasizing the deep connection between activism, place, and historical memory.

Yakama traditions place women at the center as wisdom keepers and transmitters of knowledge. They have long been responsible for preserving embodied knowledge and maintaining a strong connection between activism, place, and historical memory. Within this tradition, there is a deep respect for history and for those who document important events, memories, and the story of the people. Place-based activism is closely tied to cultural preservation and historical knowledge, rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing that honor storytelling, memory, and the land as vital sources of resistance and continuity.[14] These values are essential to how Yakama ways of being and knowing are carried forward.

This foundational framework continues to develop within Yakama activism through intergenerational knowledge transmission. Elders serve as the primary wisdom keepers, protecting place-based teachings vital to the community's cultural integrity. The younger generation has a responsibility to actively learn from elders, embodying teachings through reenactment and modeling the framework of relationality and reciprocity.[15] These practices empower the community by reaffirming bonds between members and protecting against social challenges. Studies reveal that these practices serve a protective role, showing a positive relationship between cultural identification and overall well-being.

The inherent knowledge and capacity of Yakama peoples to heal what Jacob terms "soul wounds" is rooted in immense strength and resilience enacted through activism and cultural revitalization via community-led healing processes.[16] Cultural practices protect and actively heal spiritual wounds, with engagement in traditional knowledge and ceremonies serving as pathways to reconnect with heritage and restore balance.[17] I've witnessed this type of healing through Yakama women's ceremonial leadership and seasonal harvesting practices, where the healing qualities of traditional ceremonies and practices become evident through the revitalization of community bonds and the fostering of empowerment. Yakama women

[13] Gregory A. Cajete, "Indigenous Science, Climate Change, and Indigenous Community Building: A Framework of Foundational Perspectives for Indigenous Community Resilience and Revitalization," *Sustainability* 12, no. 22 (2020): 9569, https://doi.org/10.3390/su12229569.

[14] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 114.

[15] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 24.

[16] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 60.

[17] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 60.

and elders reclaim and practice traditions that serve as a vital form of healing for individual and collective soul wounds.

Currents of Huli Medicine: Feminine Forces and Relational Healing

Building on the theoretical foundation of *Hulí* as a set of interconnected theories centered on relationality, reciprocity, resilience, and the cycling of embodied knowledge, I explore the specific currents shaping *Hulí* as medicine, particularly in relation to the feminine forces and relational healing that sustain cultural resilience. These concepts demonstrate how embodied practices and spiritual relationships can serve as healing and protective qualities that resist the destructive effects of colonialism.

Medicine encompasses a range of practices across Eastern, Western, and Indigenous traditions. Yet at its core, it returns to the mother—reflected in the Sanskrit roots: *maa*, meaning mother, and to measure, and *manya*, meaning to move back and forth, to align in the middle.[18] Ultimately, it all returns to the mother. In the Indigenous way of knowing—Mother Earth—it all connects back to relationality, not only in cyclic interaction but also in rhythmic entwinement, as if orchestrated by the Creator in divine movement. This cyclical rhythm is inherently feminine, as it's mirrored in the lives of women whose bodies and roles are interwoven and deeply connected to the earth's cycles of renewal, growth, and transformation.

The intrinsic femininity embedded in Indigenous cosmologies often conceptualizes Mother Earth as both life-giving and life-sustaining, and the treatment of land and the treatment of women are inextricably linked, with respect for one naturally reflecting and reinforcing respect for the other.[19] As articulated in Sahaptin teachings documented by Beavert, this relational ethic is perhaps nowhere more beautifully expressed than during sweat lodge ceremonies, where the Holy Man's teaching is described as "pure poetry": "Earth takes care of all living things. The Earth is our mother, and she represents womanhood; therefore, we must respect all women."[20]

Jacob offers a perspective embedded in Yakama legend–one that invites us to imagine a shift in the dynamics of our relationships with one another, particularly between men and women.[21] In many Yakama stories, we are encouraged to reconsider relational dynamics, particularly between men and women. In narratives featuring Spilyay (Coyote), he is depicted as a figure who consistently seeks guidance from his wise sisters in times of need, acknowledging the essential perspectives and knowledge that women contribute. These stories promote a vision in which men genuinely honor and value women's counsel. Such a vision challenges the hierarchies imposed by settler colonialism by highlighting

[18] Leslie E. Korn, *Rhythms of Recovery: Trauma, Nature and the Body*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 6.

[19] Virginia R. Beavert, *The Gift of Knowledge / Ttnúwit Átawish Nch'inch'imamí: Reflections on Sahaptin Ways*, ed. Janne L. Underriner (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019), 40.

[20] Beavert, *The Gift of Knowledge*, 40.

[21] Michelle M. Jacob, *Huckleberries and Coyotes: Lessons from Our More than Human Relations* (Anahuy Mentoring, LLC, 2020), 85-87.

Yakama traditions that provide relational models of balance and respect, which both predate and resist colonial frameworks that reinforce patriarchal dominance. The character of Spilyay embodies complexity and contradiction, being both conceited and a trickster, yet serving as a role model in certain respects.[22]

This relational model is vividly illustrated in Jacob's reflection on Spilyay: "*I love that Spilyay helps us see how much folly can be avoided if women were truly respected and honored … . Spilyay demonstrates relational politics; feminism is a collective project, and Spilyay models this time and time again.*"[23] This perspective shows how gender relations in Yakama culture require mutual respect and collective responsibility to sustain cultural and ceremonial life.

For Yakama feminism to continue thriving and for women to fulfill their ceremonial duties, men's active participation is essential. We see this demonstrated in Martina's interview when she remarks on how my aunt needed to hunt for a deer because the longhouse did not have one, or during Rene's interview when she explains that, in our culture, men must actively participate in land, ceremonial, and cultural responsibilities to uphold Indigenous feminism and ensure gender balance. The men are expected to protect and support the women by upholding their duties and, in doing so, create conditions in which women can flourish. The health and participation of men directly support the continuity and vitality of Yakama feminism and cultural life.

Concerns have emerged regarding the evolving roles and challenges experienced by Yakama men in contemporary society. A significant proportion face extended periods of unemployment and turn to drinking.[24] This shift emphasizes the need to confront patterns of disengagement among Native men and to reassert their responsibilities within relational systems of care, labor, and reciprocity that sustain community well-being, and calls for the intentional creation of Indigenous-led healing infrastructures that support men in reentering community life.

Expanding on concepts of Indigenous healing, methods from other cultures also emphasize the necessity of relational integrity and the interconnectedness of healing. A South African healing tradition practiced by Sangomas (Indigenous healers) illustrates that healing transcends mere curing of a disease by asserting that the restoration of health is conceived as "making life" (*kuphila*) and involves the revitalization of relational integrity within a web of interconnected influences.[25] They understand the individual not merely as a biological entity, but as an "exposed being" vulnerable to the relational forces of social, environmental, and spiritual networks.[26] Therefore, healing

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[22] Jacob, *Huckleberries and Coyotes*, 85-85.

[23] Jacob, *Huckleberries and Coyotes*, 87.

[24] Beavert, *The Gift of Knowledge*, 119.

[25] Robert J. Thornton, *Healing the Exposed Being: The Ngoma Healing Tradition in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 1, chap. 1, Bungoma or 'philosophy of the drum' in the South African Lowveld.

[26] Thornton, *Healing the Exposed Being*, 1, chap. 1, Bungoma or 'philosophy of the drum' in the South African Lowveld.

is achieved by restoring these webs of relationships and fostering the generative processes that support life, rather than by treating isolated symptoms, as is common in individual-focused approaches.

Winds of Disruption: Policy, Violence, and the Struggle for Breath

Indigenous communities collectively continue to experience profound challenges rooted in policies, violence, and environmental degradation. The cold wind (North Wind, Atyayáaya) in the Yakama legend serves as a metaphor for the destructive chill of colonial disruption. Atyayáaya symbolizes the creation and enforcement of policies that strip away land and breath, violently fracturing families and destructively eroding ecological balance through extractive economies. To understand these tensions, I examine how such forces threaten the physical and spiritual aspects of breath that sustain Indigenous communities.

The duality of wind reveals not only its capacity to heal and generate life, but also its inherent potential for harm as a volatile and disruptive force. In the literature on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), wind is portrayed as a destabilizing agent that can significantly disrupt the body's equilibrium. It disrupts internal balance and harmony, manifesting simultaneously as physical, psychological, and spiritual illness, each interacting in dynamic ways to contribute to the proliferation of disease across these interconnected domains.

Severed from the Land

Severance from land under colonialism and capitalism operates as an extractive and commodifying force that restructures Indigenous life at every level. The destruction of Celilo Falls, a historically central fishing site for the Yakama people and other Columbia River tribes, exemplifies this process.[27] This event constituted far more than material destruction; it functioned as a symbolic assertion of Western dominance as the prevailing force. The impacts of the capitalistic machinery that has encroached upon Indigenous peoples have been especially profound for women. The disruption of traditional roles has followed the loss of access to sacred foods, producing health disparities that manifest physically, emotionally, and spiritually.[28] Collectively, these effects have weakened the social fabric and cultural resilience of the Yakama community, with women positioned at the forefront of navigating and responding to these challenges.

Extraction functions as a systemic theft extending beyond physical resources to encompass Indigenous knowledge, people, and relationships. Biopiracy manifests as the violent dispossession of Indigenous communities, stripping them of cultural, spiritual, and material

[27] Kaden C. Milliren, "Resurrection Flowers and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge: Sacred Ecology, Colonial Capitalism, and Yakama Feminism as Preservation Ethic" (Master's thesis, Purdue University Graduate School, 2020), 33, https://doi.org/10.25394/PGS.12749612.v1.

[28] Milliren, "Resurrection Flowers," 35.

resources.[29] This mechanism is driven by capitalism, aiming to commodify and privatize natural resources for profit. The emphasis on profit always drives expansion and extraction of resources, leading to ongoing cycles of dispossession and environmental degradation faced by all Indigenous communities worldwide.

Extraction and assimilation are mutually reinforcing processes that underpin colonial and capitalist systems. Land, plants, animals, and Indigenous knowledge are treated as commodities to be taken, often without consent or regard for consequences. These acts are not neutral; they disrupt relationships, sever connections, and appropriate what sustains life. Over time, such systems have targeted Indigenous communities, disproportionately impacted women, and eroded the social and cultural foundations of Indigenous life.[30]

The recognition of the interconnectedness of all life forms and the imperative to respect those relationships is formally articulated in the proposed Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth:

- **Article 1: Mother Earth**
  Mother Earth is understood as a living, indivisible, self-regulating system in which all beings are interdependent. Each being exists as part of a web of relationships that sustains, contains, and reproduces life, and its identity is inseparable from these relational connections.
- **Article 2: Inherent Rights of Mother Earth**
  Mother Earth and all beings within her possess inherent rights, including the ability to regenerate biological capacity and maintain vital cycles and processes without human interference. This also encompasses access to clean air and water, recognized as essential for sustaining life.
- **Article 3: Human Obligations to Mother Earth**
  Human beings, along with states and all institutions, hold responsibility to respect, protect, and conserve the integrity of ecological cycles, processes, and balances, and to actively restore them when they have been disrupted.[31]

The Chill and Reach of Atyayáaya (North Wind)

The impacts of colonization manifest in the bodies and minds of Indigenous peoples, often appearing as poverty, addiction, and alcoholism. These struggles are not isolated personal failures; they are symptoms of a broader, intergenerational sickness carried and shaped by colonial violence and capitalist exploitation. The sickness that lives in the body doesn't just exist as addiction

[29] Vandana Shiva, *Reclaiming the Commons: Biodiversity, Traditional Knowledge, and the Rights of Mother Earth* (Berkeley: Synergetic Press, 2020), 242.

[30] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 44-45.

[31] Shiva, *Reclaiming the Commons*, 285-288.

but emanates from the person and penetrates the *Hulí* that surrounds the valley. When we go up to our cemeteries to clean the graves of our loved ones, we see thieves take the sentimental gifts we leave behind, replacing them with alcohol containers. They treat our relatives' resting places like trash because they see themselves the same way—lost and without purpose, as if they too have forgotten the sacredness of life and now walk among the dead.

In *Yakama Rising*, Virginia Beavert reflects on the cultural and economic changes affecting men and their ability to uphold responsibilities that sustain gender balance:

> "I'm afraid the language is dying. And the culture is dying with it. What I see, I see people walking on the road, and men just lying around out there in the shade in town and not working. Not doing anything! They're not all that old, you know. They are middle-aged, maybe even younger… We need to put some self-esteem into our male people… Be more aware of it. It isn't all just per capita, you know, there's a lot more involved in this tribe than just per capita. And I see all these addictions; that isn't part of our culture… but you know we always had our cultural ways."[32]

This *Hulí* hangs over the valley, casting a heavy veil of pain and darkness. When we practice our traditions and participate in the ceremony of cleaning our ancestors' graves, we can feel that energy clinging stubbornly to our relatives—those who have been engaged in self-destructive behavior brought on by colonialism and capitalism and carried and kept alive by those same forces. It shapes intergenerational struggles as a familiar existence that circles continuously, keeping us torn apart from our spirit, from each other, and severing the interconnected, reciprocal, and relational healing of all our relatives, the land, animals, and each other.

This *Hulí* does not dissipate easily or bring healing; it is the type that consumes and destroys continuously. We see this form in a Yakama story: the legend of Southwind. Not all *Hulí* are healing, as it holds a multidimensional meaning and continues to shift, evolve, and reform. In the legend, it depicts Atyayáaya, the Cold Wind, who once froze the land and killed all kinds of life, inflicting severe suffering on the people and leaving the land harsh and uninhabitable. Atyayáaya, a chilling and destructive force, is a powerful metaphor for the corrosive, entrenched colonial trauma and systems of oppression that continue to entrap our community in cycles of disconnection and despair.

The Breath That Connects: Huli as Theoretical Framework

"It is not 'society' that suffers, but rather suffering that is propagated through people in relation to one another."[33] Thornton explains the relational conditions of illness by demonstrating that suffering is not isolated to the individual;

[32] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 111.

[33] Thornton, *Healing the Exposed Being*, 248-263.

rather, illness is a dynamic force that propagates through interpersonal, social, and spiritual webs of connection, kinship, and relational entanglement.[34]

Simpson makes this relational extension explicit, describing how energy moves beyond the human body.[35] This concept extends beyond just human energy exchange, emphasizing the capacity for our energy to move into and affect all beings: "...our energy and feelings were going into the boiling sap as we spent time with it, and that the syrup would carry that energy."[36]

Spending time with food or other elements of the natural world carries our intentions and feelings into them, so that what we create or prepare holds and transmits that energy. In this context, using harsh words or negative energy while working with food can disrupt its vitality, potentially affecting those who consume it. Attention to intention and energy is therefore central to the practice, ensuring that both the food and the relationships it supports are sustained.[37]

These teachings describe the spirit that is carried in the food and in the person who prepares, gathers, and interacts with it. They emphasize the inherent interconnectedness and the relational accountability we hold to one another through these practices, highlighting that the spirits of people and the foods they engage with are interconnected. These teachings are passed down to youth and hold profound lessons, showing that through them, youth come to understand that their spirits matter and that they participate in a relational responsibility that is reciprocal, as each spirit both gives and receives care; synergistic, where individual and collective well-being enhance one another; and mutually sustaining, supporting and renewing the bonds that uphold community and connection.[38] Elders have taught that everything is connected and that you can speak with them just as you would speak with a relative. That is—the fire, the rocks, the water, the land and *Hulí* is the constant between the sustenance for all.[39] From Mother Earth's breath to our very own, it is all one.

Building on the understanding of Mother Earth as life-giving and self-sustaining my father recounted a story from his childhood.[40] He was with my grandmother, his mother, and she explained that the wind is the breath of Mother Earth. He had expressed fear of the wind, and she reassured him that Mother Earth's breath is essential for life and that our very existence depends upon it. This reflection reinforces how Indigenous teachings are infused with teachings of environmental care and the life-sustaining forces of the feminine.

Hulí is the breath that moves through everything—the wind that carries memory and knowledge, and the breath that reinforces that we

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[34] Thornton, *Healing the Exposed Being*, 248-263.

[35] Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 36.

[36] Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 36.

[37] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 97-98.

[38] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 31.

[39] Beavert, *The Gift of Knowledge*, 97.

[40] Beavert, *The Gift of Knowledge*, 40.

are not separate from each other or from the land. *Hulí* connects us to all of our relatives: humans, plants, water, animals—nothing exists on its own. Thus, breath is not only a function of the body; rather, in its multiplicity, it embodies a living force that sustains, nourishes, remembers, and gives messages—if we slow down enough to listen.

Grounding Research in Hulí

Through my research, I have remained grounded in a participatory approach linked to *Hulí*—the wind as a living and dynamic force of transmission and continuity of cultural practices and traditions. Participating alongside the women's line in berry picking and root digging reinforced the idea that traditional knowledge is most powerfully transmitted through embodied practice rather than solely through oral lessons or textual accounts. As with the wind—dynamic and ever-changing, shifting from drastic movement to sometimes subtle or imperceptible—tradition moves in ways that are experienced through ongoing, transformative, flexible, relational participation, resisting static articulation.

The constraints of deadlines, given that the internship was for a specified period, created intense pressure to perform according to established benchmarks, even though the deadlines were flexible and accommodating through supervision. I was reminded that I am operating in the contradictory worlds of capitalism, which demands a rigid, timeline-focused approach and expects deliverables measured by rubrics assessing the ability to produce specific results, and the cyclical, unhurried rhythms of the seasons and the land, following Indigenous timelines. I had to be patient with the roots and berries and let them determine my timeline—a practice that was frustrating and anxiety-inducing, but one that reminded me to slow down and let the natural process of my work unfold when it was supposed to. Everything happened when it was time for my lessons to be put into practice.

Children and young adults need dedicated time to their elders, as teachings are passed down through storytelling, example, and repeated practice.[41] This resonates deeply with my own experience conducting research within my community, as the central epistemological principles were grounded in a slow, cumulative, repetitive, and generative process.

In contrast, traditional research methods are rooted in Western paradigms that favor objectivity and textual documentation, a process that risks diluting the richness of the holistic, intentionally slow, and performative qualities that underpin Indigenous epistemologies.

The vital epistemological acts consisted of embodied participation in picking berries, digging roots, dancing, and praying on the wash at the longhouse, and engaging with and moving with the land. Through these lived practices, I came to remember that my DNA recognized the vital transmission of knowledge through the fusion of body, land, and tradition, a transmission that words alone cannot capture.

[41] Jacob, *Yakama Rising*, 118.

In the approach of Western research, the act of dissection, or attempts to codify these practices, risks losing their immediacy and spiritual resonance, which are central to Indigenous ways of understanding and being. My experience demonstrates that research within Indigenous contexts requires a participatory, relational, and place-based approach, rooted in the lessons from the land.

Conclusion

The challenge of an Indigenous researcher, who concurrently interprets from different vantage points and integrates the self into the act of observation, positions us as both the perceiver and the perceived, the analyst and the analyzed. We remain ever-changing—from our positionality to our conceptuality—and require a variety of approaches and methods for analyzing and making meaning—for generating life and dreaming—to create a world where Indigenous theory is cultivated in the next generation, which is our privileged responsibility.

We are not confined by the temporal limitations imposed by colonized ways of learning; instead, we are invited into a profound shift—a kinship perspective that recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings. This opens a space for creating connections that only imagination and deep engagement with all life can offer.

We adapt to our teacher and simultaneously take responsibility for our role as a teacher, whether it be the land, an elder, or the *Hulí*. We have the opportunity and privilege to examine, and more importantly, to operate within the function of embodied learning. We learn because we are not separate from the teacher; instead, we are intertwined in existence, with boundaries dissolved, revealing that teaching and learning are not discrete acts but a continuous, shared becoming.

And just as *Hulí*—the wind in its many formless states—the concept of theory is both fluid and purposeful. It can function as a field map, revealing directions and patterns that help us navigate and respond to shifting conditions. It guides movement by indicating where to go or what to avoid. It can organize knowledge and orient action. It helps us dissect and illuminate a landscape of ideas, relationships, and contexts, and enables us to anticipate outcomes and plan accordingly.

Just as *Hulí* reveals how the natural world shifts and breathes, theory reveals the currents of meaning and consequence, guiding us through the complexity of social and cultural terrains. Hulí offers us a path toward continuity; it renews, revitalizes, and reinvigorates the enactment of cultural teachings, capturing the essence of life and resilience. *Hulí* carries stories, prayers, medicine, and, importantly, encompasses the spirit of resistance that sustains us across the generations. Land-based ceremonies like root gathering, sweat lodges, and berry picking allow us to reclaim and nourish sacred connections, resist the destructive disruptions of historical trauma, and reaffirm kinship with the land, our ancestors, and each other. The relational strength found in sintering reinforces the structure of our

communities, creating a flexible, durable, and unbreakable cycle of life that continues to nourish our identities and teachings. In listening to the messages from *Hulí*, we honor its teachings,[42] we affirm our role as stewards, honoring our duties and responsibilities, and embracing the wisdom from the land and our ancestors as the knowledge transmission flows onward toward the future generations, being guided by *Hulí's* silent but persistent call for renewal and hope.

[42] Simpson, *Theory of Water*, 29.

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Hailey Allen (Thx̲) is Yakama and Umatilla and recently graduated with a BS in Public Health, with minors in Political Science and American Indian Studies. A former CWIS summer intern, she now joins the organization as the Kiaux Russell Jim Public Health Research Fellow, where her work centers on women's traditional medicine.

Allen was inspired to pursue this work by her great-uncle, the late Yakama elder Russell Jim, a longhouse leader and environmental protector, whose dedication to community shaped her approach to research and public health. Grounded in an Indigenous feminist lens, her scholarship highlights women's roles within the Yakama Longhouse. In Women at the Longhouse: Part One, she explores how medicine, ceremony, and First Food teachings sustain cultural knowledge across generations.

Allen balances her professional, creative, and family life as a mother of two. She is a distance runner, co-founder of Huli Boardshop in Ferndale, Washington, and a professional visual artist on the ArtsWA Public Artist Roster, creating works that center Indigenous women through bold, layered, abstract portraiture.