





"A teaching from our elders that says you have to know your history. You have to know what is behind you in order to know where you are going. If you do not understand that history, you cannot ever have any vision about where it is you want to go."

Patricia Monture-Angus

Cultural safety is defined as an approach to health and well-being that takes into account the contemporary conditions of Indigenous people resulting from their post-contact history. In other words, it is the importance of preserving our culture in a context where institutions (ex: education, religion, etc.) that do not easily allow us to practice our way of life at a social, political and cultural level.

Here, we understand the importance of decolonization to better promote a necessary re-appropriation of our cultural wealth in a manner that is adapted to our current conditions.

First, we must become familiar with the history of our people, the strength and resilience of their knowledge as well as the differences between tradition and culture.

### Colonization: Understanding the Roots of Historical Trauma

For thousands of years, the *liiyiyuu-liyinu* people of *liiyiyuuschi* have abided to the many traditions defined by the spirits and shape of their land. By following their traditional laws and values, the *liiyiyuu-liyinu* achieved balance with their surroundings, the spirit world and, last but not least, themselves.

However, the arrival of European traders and their way of life disturbed this balance, thus disrupting the continuity of cultural transmission rooted in countless generations of tradition. Through the mechanisms of colonialism, the *waamishtikushiiyu* have made many attempts to assimilate our people, causing us to lose much of our cultural knowledge. At a certain time in our recent history, either it be through Residential Schools or an imposed sedentary lifestyle, we have been denied the right to practice and learn through our culture.



Photo by Jacko Otter

### Cultural Security

This concept comes into play the moment we acknowledge the necessity of restoring and assuring the continuity of our culture. By integrating the indigenous cultural component such as the *liiyiyuu-liyinu* way of life in our post-colonial structures, we ensure a secure link of transmission well into the future generations.

Cultural security is also a way of decolonizing and indigenizing imposed structures we use today. In accordance with a holistic and inclusive vision, we honour both culture and tradition while adapting to the current context in which our people live.

Concrete uses of cultural security can be done, for example, through the inclusion of our elders in political spaces such as community consultations or advisory councils. In addition, offering culturally safe spaces is another way of using cultural security to our advantage. This assures that, in spite of the fact that we use *waamishtikushiiyu* ways in certain structures we may still include aspects of our own *liiyiyuu-liyinu* ways such as traditional medicine or teachings like the *miichiwap* in the process.

### The *liiyiyuu-liyinu* People in Present Times: Culture vs. Tradition

Integrating culture everywhere possible is the best way to preserve the traditions we still observe today. To better grasp the importance of cultural security one must understand the key distinctions between culture and tradition.

The concept of tradition is one of symbolism. It is the act of passing on beliefs and knowledge from one generation to the next. As for culture, it is a reflection of a society at a given moment in time.

When talking about cultural security, we must take into account the dynamics of change. Sedentary lifestyle, ruptures in cultural transmission and even technology make it impossible for us to live exclusively from the land. This is why we must re-appropriate our culture and adapt it to our present-day practices. In turn, we allow our people to heal through tradition, and to develop healthy ways of life within the present culture.

Photo by Tania Sibi

