Sisters Rising Research Update – February 2021

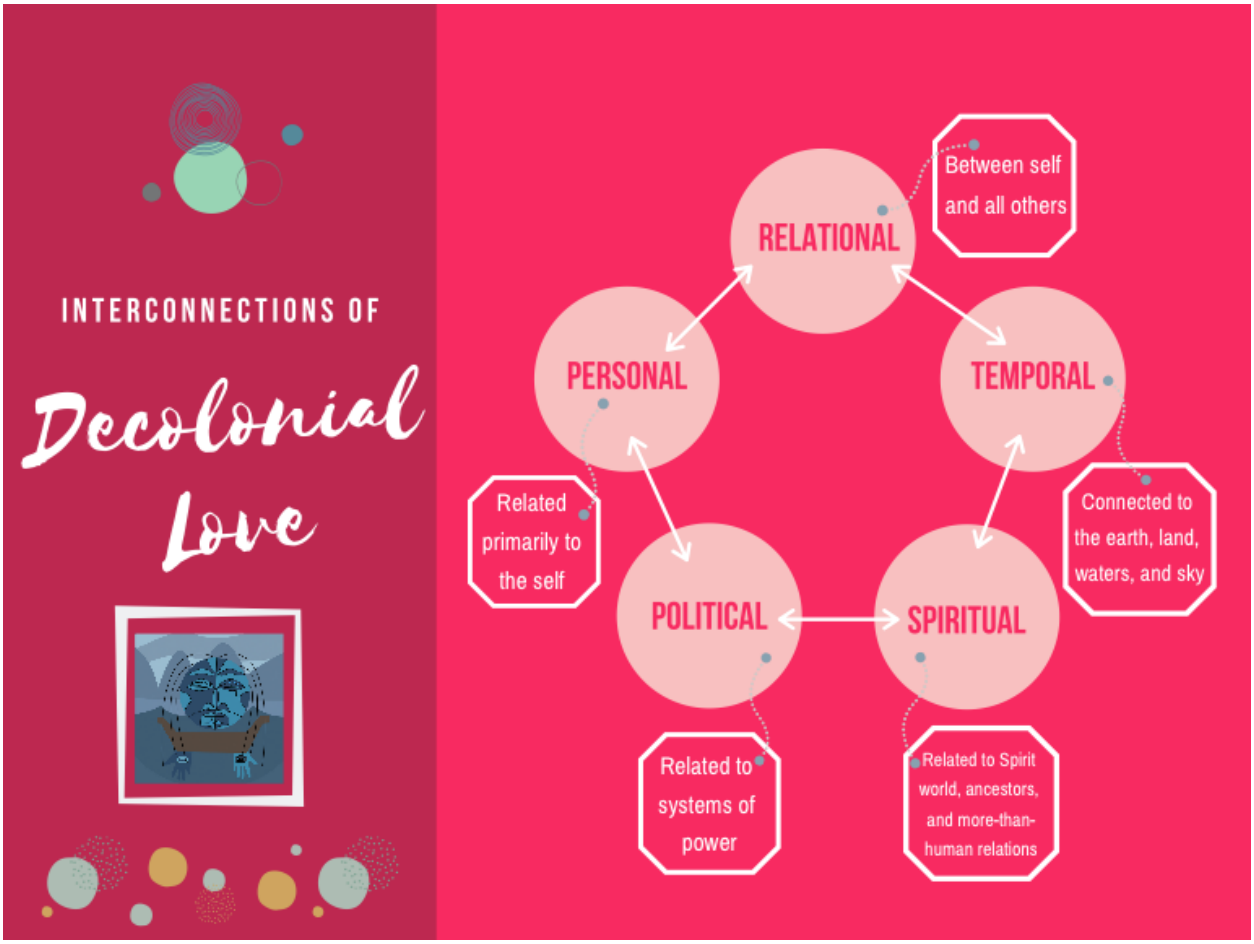
My name is Shantelle Andrea Moreno. I was born to young immigrant parents who left their homelands as a direct result of violent conflict and economic devastation. My father, who was born in Chile, is of mixed Spanish and Mapuche Indigenous ancestry. He immigrated to Canada in the early 1980s, fleeing U.S.-backed civil wars in both Chile and Argentina. My mother was born in Suva, Fiji, and is of Indian descent. Her family has lived in Fiji for generations as a result of British-initiated labour programs in which tens of thousands of Indians were forced to work as indentured servants and labourers, primarily on sugar cane plantations. They met, married, and raised their children on the territories of the Musqueam and Tsleil-Waututh peoples, in what is commonly known as Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

I am a working-class, mixed-race, queer woman of colour who has been living on Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ territories (Victoria, BC) for almost 17 years. Many of these years have been spent as a student at the University of Victoria and because of this experience, I acknowledge the disproportionate privilege I hold as a graduate student in the School of Child and Youth Care. I lean into the tensions of embodying this educational privilege, while also recognizing that my educational experiences form the theoretical and practice-based underpinnings of my research work with Sisters Rising. The opportunity to pursue a university education has also led me to some of my biggest passions including: my career as a school counsellor, my work as a research facilitator with Sisters Rising (sistersrising.uvic.ca), and my role as a teaching assistant in the School of Child and Youth Care.

My research study was conducted in the summer of 2017, on the unceded homelands of Coast Salish nations (on the west coast of Turtle Island in British Columbia, Canada), as part of Sisters Rising, an Indigenous-led research study employing youth-engaged, participatory and arts- and land-based methodologies to "[focus] on challenging the victim-blaming climate of racialised gender violence by re-centering Indigenous values and teachings and linking body sovereignty to questions of decolonization and land sovereignty" (de Finney et al. 2018: 24). I hosted individual and group sessions with seven individuals who identified as Indigenous, racialized, people of color, mixed-race and/or biracial. Much of my own learning in Queer, Trans, and 2-Spirit BIPOC (QT2SBIPOC) activist communities over the past decade has highlighted the essentiality of QT2SBIPOC perspectives in movements of dismantling colonial power and working toward Indigenous land and body sovereignty. I acknowledge that the exploration of decolonial love that I sought to highlight in my research would have been incomplete without the knowledge shared by QT2SBIPOC individuals. This understanding affected my participant recruitment since several participants were acquaintances connected through local circles of anti-racist/Indigenous activist and advocacy groups. Some participants reached out through mutual friends and were interested in my research as it applied to their experiences as undergraduate students. Each of the seven participants self-identified as a girl, young woman, and/or LGBT2SQ+ person.

Using arts- and -land based materials, participants shared both pre-existing and co-created knowledge around their experiences and conceptualizations of decolonial love, sovereignty, and

resurgence, as Indigenous and racialized peoples. The 5 main themes that emerged were focused on decolonial love as relational, temporal, spiritual, political, and personal – as further reflected on in the image below.

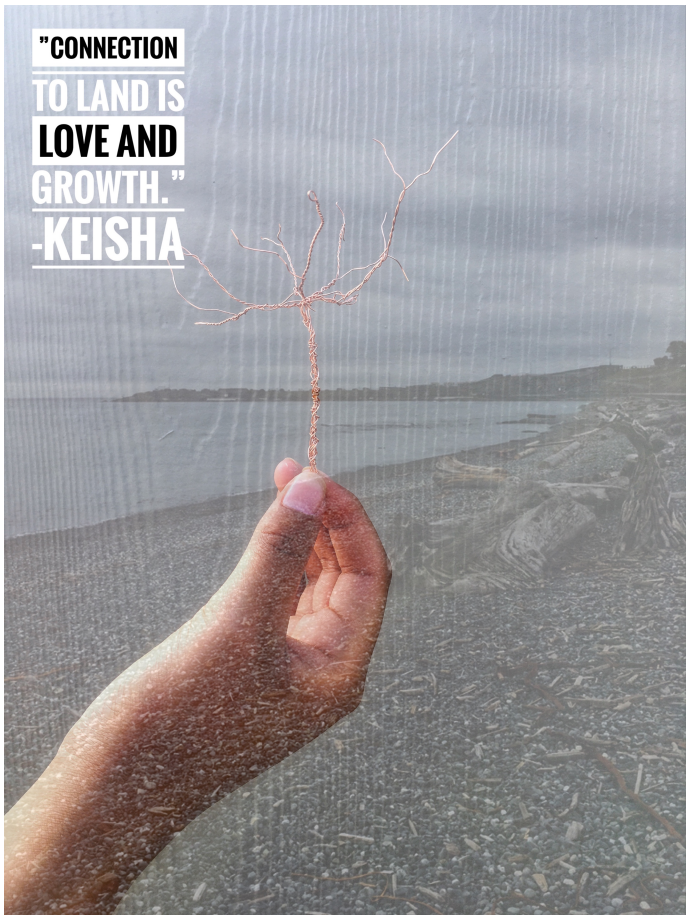


Many participants framed decolonial love as temporal, describing how love is expressed through connection to the land, waters, and sky. Additionally, many expressed love as a felt sense experienced between the self and others. Participant Keisha Jones, who identified as W̱SANEĆ and Pacheedaht, noted:

When I think about love and connection I think about how I feel at home when I'm out on the land and out on the water and out in the community in that area; it's just a huge part of love for me. It's home.

Her affirmation of home and belonging emphasized complex understandings of the power of love and land, reinforcing the need to uphold Indigenous young people as knowledge holders across their homelands. Keisha went on to describe the significance of her art piece—a carefully twisted copper wire tree—explaining that "our connection to land is love and growth. Trees really represent that for me." Her knowledge that land is a vital component not only of

decolonial love, but also for growth as an individual and as part of a larger whole, bolsters the notion that "everything [needed] to live a good life is in and from the earth" (Gilpin 2018: 51).



Participants rejected neoliberal conceptualizations of love and self-care as individualized, bio-medicalized processes that serve the self above all else, and each participant spoke to the interconnectedness and relationality that is at the heart of decolonial love. My hope is that the conceptualizations of love highlighted in this research can contribute meaningfully to the groundwork being laid by Indigenous and racialized communities across Turtle Island who continue to assert their rightful sovereignty through reclamation, resurgence and practices of decolonial love.