

# IGSS Journal

## INDIGENOUS GRADUATE STUDENT SYMPOSIUM

Sam Tsuruda, 2021

### **ABSTRACT: (Un)learning colonialism one nervous system at a time: The need for education that overrides the rational mind**

Due to the reign of white-body supremacy, every person living on Turtle Island has embodied colonialism and racialized trauma in some form, to some degree (Menakem, 2017). At the IGSS this year, I would love to share my learnings about neurodecolonial healing, as a 2S person with mixed-Indigenous-Japanese-European ancestry, in my doctoral studies to date – a journey I have been exploring to (un)learn harmful narratives, worldviews, and beliefs that have amounted to a range of mental/physical/emotional/spiritual health challenges.

After digging for the roots of culturally safe, decolonizing pedagogies for the past six years, I have come to understand that (un)learning efforts solely aimed at educating the mind are at greater odds of neurological defence: the reptilian brain, which serves as our mental bodyguard, blocks out any knowledge that is seemingly threatening from entering our higher cognitive mind, the part that can engage in [critical] thinking (Yellow Bird, 2013). In other words, it can inhibit us from metabolizing uncomfortable information. The reptilian brain may interpret stories as threats to our safety, when they are simply invitations to feel shared pain and raise heart-consciousness. My belief is that we are inheriting ignorance as survival. White-body supremacy capitalizes off our self-protection mechanisms, preventing us from developing deeper relations and evolving as humanity.

In this talk, I invite others to explore with me the concepts of reclaiming wholeness in the face of colonized identities; theories that support us to take power back, beginning with our own nervous systems.