Experiencing Allyhood
The complicated and conflicted journey of a Spiritual-Mestiza-Ally to
the land of colonization/decolonization

by

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B.Sc., Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1985

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Supervisory Committee

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Ally literature suggests processes and guidelines that non-Indigenous researchers can follow in order to establish respectful relationships (Battiste, 1998; Wilson, 2008; Edward, 2006; Margaret, 2010). It also states the importance of preparedness for engaging and sustaining long term alliances (Lang, 2010; Brophey, 2011); however specific training methods; modalities that support long-term relationships; practices to develop desired qualities; or self-care approaches for Allies have not been addressed in the literature. Through autoethnographic work I sought to explore this gap in literature. This study is situated within decolonizing methodologies looking to contribute to legitimizing traditional ways of knowing; and within Anzaldúa’s philosophical view of “Doing Mestizaje” (1987). My work is a personal account of the complicated and conflicted situation of working as an Ally, being both Mestiza and Buddhist in a culture of colonization/decolonization. Unique to this exploration are modalities I chose to help with a deeper understanding, and as possible approaches to address emotional stress and prevent burnout in Ally work: art, meditation, mindfulness practice, prayer, dream work, and narrative/poetry. My findings show that a Mestizo view of Allyhood presents differences with those of White Allies; that implementation of the Buddhist concepts of interdependence and selflessness can support Allies during a painful or stressful process of self-reflection, as well as through out the relationship; and that doing research as ceremony, and ceremony as research contributes to the revitalization of Indigenous traditional ways of knowing and its importance in Decolonizing work.
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A todos los seres sintientes
FRONTISPICE

Allyhood A Special Friendship

When I was invited to work with and for Indigenous people in Canada six years ago, I entered a difficult path for which I did not know there was a name. Carrying my ignorance and cultural baggage, I stumbled many times, hurting others and also myself.

Frustration and depression became frequent visitors that stayed with me during those difficult days. And even when nature displayed its majesty, letting me know everything was well, life was still tough, confronting abuse and confusion.

Often I felt the need to go away, to leave my work and turn my back to the pain. Days became hard, and nights were dreamless, as it became harder to listen to the stories of so many youths killing themselves. The stories would haunt me and I wanted to vanquish them, but they were so strong, and alive that I just couldn’t do it.

Even though I had no answer to the many questions posed to me even though I had never been prepared for something like this. I couldn’t close my eyes and turn away.

So I kept doing my work the best I could. I prayed every morning in hope of gaining an insight and asking for strength. I kept going from community to community, like a gypsy, carrying with me a bag of hope as my greatest possession. I was a witness of the effect of colonization, with no words to express what my soul sensed.

As time passed by and my wound grew bigger, like a strong weed in the garden of love, I asked myself “where do you find help or support to keep going?” Where is the fountain that refreshes the fire and prevents from giving up when all seems to be gone?

I had two options and I chose both of them. I asked guidance from my Spiritual Teachers, and also entered a university in search of help. I needed to sharpen my skills and ground myself. I had to find meaning to this anger, frustration, and pain.
Both of the options I took for this task, gave fruit but in a different way. As expected, my lamas with their care and spiritual teachings helped me ground myself, thereby allowing me to find answers from a deeper place. Their words always guided me to stay present no matter what came.

I was asked to light candles for those who had suffered but mostly to pray for all those people that had inflicted the pain. They reminded me constantly that this life is short and that we are all sitting in the same boat.

The academic world gave me a different lesson. I learned they too are in struggle and pain. I met many people who mostly live in their heads. Yet among them it is possible to find Spiritual Teachers like precious jewels with great teachings as well.

In university, the great palace of knowledge, I was able to learn about the history of the places where I used to work. I learned how they had been pushed aside, colonized, abused, and robbed of their land. I understood the reasons that had created the shadow of sadness that was too hard to name. I learned the truth of residential schools and about the many children that had died in them. I understood why the trauma was still alive and fresh.

Indigenous scholars reclaim and rename in the endless fight to find themselves. They know land, language, culture and beliefs had been crushed and something needed to be done in order to create the change. Their task is not easy as the game takes place, in the mouth of the wolf that devoured their flesh.

I also observed that both scholars, Indigenous and White, share today a common space. A change is happening and its force can already be felt.

The momentum is strong, be attentive, and stay awake, as many students are joining the trenches nowadays. I am one of those students, who has struggled very hard looking for guidance in the path.

Some friends and I found a great course that opened our minds and made us reflect. We spent hours talking, challenging, and debating a complex process that seems to have no end.

Decolonization, allyhood, ethics, oppression, rename and reclaim, became our words, our mantra our prayer. We shed preconceptions and faced the role that we unknowingly have played as the oppressor.
At first I was angry, shouting “I am innocent”, but slowly I lowered my voice in shame as I realized that oppression is not something that stands on its own, but is rather a co-creation we all share.

Finally in order to graduate I became an Ally. I worked with a Cree Medicine Man, building a website for him to display his teachings and wisdom, and to earn a living in the colonized world.

Following I will recount the work we did together and the healing that took place. With stories and oracle readings, dreams, and prayers while surfing the Internet, we built a friendship that here I begin to share.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Doing mestizaje

Getting untangled

Floating?

Going to the Dreamtime
**Background of the Problem**

One of the ways in which the historic colonization of the western hemisphere by Europeans has hurt Indigenous people has been through research. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999):

> The term research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself ‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. (p. 1)

Yet for the past two decades and through social justice work, a growing number of people belonging to the dominant social groups have looked to build a different, decolonizing relationship based on solidarity and partnership, aiming to end the system of oppression that gave them the power, in search of a more egalitarian world. (Broido, 2005, Bishop, 2002, Reason, Millar & Scales, 2005).

Non-Indigenous people, who have recognized their privileged status and are now looking to engage in respectful relationships with Indigenous people, are known as Allies, a term coined by Ann Bishop in 1994 (Bishop, 1994).

According to the Ally literature, the most important work for an Ally is self-reflection in order to recognize personal privilege, and participation in structures of oppression in order to gain self-liberation. Doing so, Allies can ensure their narratives and behaviors will not reproduce the dominant colonial relationship (Bishop, 2002; Broido, 2005; Edward 2006; Margaret, 2010; Lang, 2011, Brophye, 2011).

Ally Literature has also outlined specific qualities and values that Allies must develop in order to establish respectful alliances and not contribute to the
hurt that research has done to Indigenous people. Margaret (2010) for example states as important qualities to grow: humility, ability to listen careful, sense of humor, patience, usefulness, knowing yourself, knowing and acknowledging whose land you are on, groundedness, endurance, long-term commitment, flexibility, letting go of knowing, of being right, of having the answers, being open to constant learning, courage, critical awareness, and self-awareness. She also recommends Allies to “engage in specific and separate work amongst their own people, as well as supporting the struggles of those they are in alliance with” (p. 8), and develop a deep understanding of what is “the dominant-white/colonial mindset” (p. 8).

Although most of Ally research has paid much attention to the qualities required to engage in alliances, some authors such as Goodman (2000) have focus on the importance of self-interest in the development of altruism, and Broido, 2005; Reason, Millar & Scales, 2005; Edwards, 2006; and Lang, 2010 have focused on developmental stages of becoming an Ally among university students.

Important founding of these researches are: precollege egalitarian values, opportunity to gather information, engaged in meaning making processes, developing confidence, and opportunities to act, made students prone to engage in successful Ally work (Reason, Millar & Scales (2005); and becoming an Ally encompass a developmental process that goes from self-interest, to social justice altruism (Edwards, 2006). Recently Lang (2010) explained that empirical studies at universities have been mostly focused on nurturing Ally behavior in college, with no interest in developing long-term commitments to social justice outside of the college experience.
Ally literature also mentions Allyhood is a complex endeavor and that it is often accompanied with emotional stress. This is commonly due to Allie’s self-reflection regarding participation in the structures of oppression and as a result of working on personal decolonization (Bishop, 1994; Margaret, 2010; Edwards, 2006; Davis, 2010; Lang 2011). Bishop said: “coming to understand one’s identities as an oppressor is often and enervating process…it is coming to see yourself as an inheritor of a shameful and evil past” (p. 96).

In relation to the above other authors have also expressed the difficulties of being an Ally. Davis, (2010) wrote:

It is very difficult to do this work. It’s like jumping into cold water off the end of a pier, when you do not know how to swim. It is hard building trust.
It’s very hard work too. You have to spend a lot of time. You have to really look at yourself. (p. 346)

Furthermore Davis, (2010) explained:
Working through something as intense and deep as colonization causes pain for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. During this process feelings can be hurt as people struggle with the concept and reality of colonization. As Indigenous people struggle to confront the pain of colonization in its many forms, non-Indigenous peoples struggle to look inward at their own role within colonization, and confront themselves. (p. 343)

In relation to the difficulty of working in alliances, Brophey (2011) found that “orientation towards respecting different ways of being in the world and a desire to understand and support people to follow their own path” (p. 90, 91) were main components in sustaining long time relationships, although a
difference in the capacity for self-reflection regarding owns practice varies among researchers. Although Brophey’s study focused on “researchers” not Allies, her work can also offer a semblance of the problems that exist in alliances as well as regarding emotional turmoil that can be found when non-Indigenous researchers work in partnership with Indigenous people.

**The Problem**

In the past two decades Ally work has increased within universities due to the interest students have shown in engaging in collaborative projects with Indigenous people (Lang 2010). Researches regarding student’s engagement in social Ally practices and Ally identity developmental models have flourished parallel to this increase of demand. The work of Broido, (2000), Reason, Roosa Millar & Scales, (2005; ) and Edwards, (2006) are examples of this interest. Yet courses or training on becoming an Ally in universities have not shown the same attention (Lang, 2010; Brophey, 2011). In addition, research studies on Allyhood, have not focused on finding specific strategies to develop the qualities needed for Ally work, leaving this difficult process to the Ally's own resources and inner strength. Along with this, there is also a lack of research regarding Ally self-care techniques, or regarding specific modalities and practices that Allies can use to prepare and sustain long-term alliances, address emotional stress, and prevent burnout.

In order to help aspiring Allies develop the necessary qualities and engage in positive and successful alliances, it is important to explore possible approaches by which aspiring Allies can be prepared and develop Ally self-care strategies.
When I engaged in alliance with Chepwapisk, a Plains Cree Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher, in the creation of a website to present and market his teachings, I was confronted with this gap in Ally literature and had to find and develop new strategies to address this issue.

As I engaged in alliance with Chepwapisk, I expected my role as an Ally would be to understand the Medicine Man’s needs and desires in wanting to have an online presence to transmit and sell his teachings. Together we would design the website, including general layout and individual pages, fonts, images and navigation system. I would assist him in recording the Spiritual teachings he decided to offer and developing the engine optimization needed to position his work in the Internet. Following Ally literature, I would participate with him behind and besides, supporting his decisions, and acting as a supportive friend always available for him.

As an Ally I would engage myself in my personal process of reflection regarding my role in the sustaining of colonial oppression. I would also explore the possibilities and difficulties that the development of Ally qualities present. Furthermore, I would investigate possible use of qualitative approaches such as divination, mindfulness practice and art based reflection, to address emotional stress and prevent burnout in Allyhood.

Being myself a Mestiza woman I was also confronted with another gap in Ally literature. No studies were found regarding alliances between Indigenous people and Méti, nor guidelines for Mestizos to act as Allies. My work would include therefore specific problems that Mestizo people encounter in Ally work and the understanding of decolonization from a Mestiza point of view.
Being also a long time spiritual practitioner, aware of the importance that the Buddhist concept of selflessness plays in the development of altruism, empathy, and positive relationships. I would explore how this notion could shape the Ally work. I also expected to gain some understanding about Indigenous spirituality and learn about Indigenous epistemologies.

This study intended to explore four main areas: The experience of Allyhood; the notion of alliance from a Buddhist perspective; the use of qualitative modalities to better Ally work; and the wisdom contained in First Nation's Spirituality and practices. Four questions guided this exploration:

1) How does a Mestiza experience Allyhood? 2) How can the embracement of the concept of selflessness influence Ally work? 3) What benefits can mindfulness practices; divination; prayers; dream work; and art-based reflections bring to Ally work? 4) What new learning and understandings can an alliance between a Mestiza and Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher bring to colonizing/decolonizing and Ally theory?

**Significance of the Study**

Ally literature review showed no studies regarding Mestizos acting as Allies, nor decolonization as seen through a Mestiza and Buddhist lens. This study presents the unique case of a Mestiza, Buddhist Mexican woman, establishing an Ally relationship with a Plains Cree Medicine Man, living in the city outside of his community. It pictures some of the tensions that led both of them to cross, geographical and cultural borders, and establish this alliance.
The lived experience this study presents, brings new light to the understanding of the complexities that accompany an alliance relationship. It points out difficulties that come when cultural and physical borders are crossed. It also pictures some of the negotiations that take place in order to resolve differences resulting from doing Ally work in an academic context.

The findings of this study enrich Ally literature in respect to the process of preparation for Allyhood and self-care of Allies. As an autoethnographic narrative it allows the reader to have a closer look into some of the emotional aspects that can arise in the Ally work, as well as some of the alternative methods that can be used to deal with those emotions, as well as to prevent or work out possible vicarious trauma or burnout.

This study explored the use of qualitative approaches for an Ally’s self-reflection and the influence that a Buddhist view of selflessness has on Ally work. The results contribute to the gap in the literature regarding prevention, and management of vicarious trauma, and the use of mindfulness practice and art-based reflection for this matter. Furthermore, this study presents the importance of doing research as ceremony and ceremony as research “living behind dominant paradigms and follow[ing] Indigenous research paradigm” (Wilson, 2008, p.38), to honor my worldview.

**Overview of the Dissertation**

In chapter One, the introduction, problem and research questions are presented. In Chapter Two a literature review of the Eastern, Western, and Indigenous concept of identity is presented, as well as the construction and social identification of identities, including the Mestiza, and Ally identities. In
Chapter Three, the methodology used for this research is presented. In Chapter Four the autoethnographic work is shared with readers as "My Story". This includes narratives regarding experiences, struggles and opportunities in the process of collaboration and the use of diverse qualitative modalities. Chapter Five presents findings and addresses the research questions. Chapter Six presents the art-based reflection. Chapter Seven presents learning outcomes, suggests practices to support Ally work, and possible future research areas to explore.
Inner borders like a whisper
Doing Mestizaje
Always negotiating a dual ancestry
Learning to explore the in-between
The Concept of Identity: Eastern, Western and Indigenous Views

Self is a concept that we use to denote existence and define experience. It is a concept that has been extensively discussed in philosophy, spirituality and religion, psychology, racial studies, communication, and art throughout time. Yet two important differences appear in the literature of identity. On one hand, we find that some philosophers and scholars have concluded the existence of an indefinable self, interconnected with nature and on the other hand others have postulated a self clearly separated. The first one resulted from an eastern perspective of life, and the second one from western philosophies.

How the different understandings of self have influenced human behavior and specifically colonization and oppression is an interesting question. Markus & Kitayama (1991) delineated two culturally different concepts of self-image, emphasizing the importance each one places on the concept of connectedness and interdependence. In their studies, they found that Western cultures saw the self as an independent self while the non-Western (Indigenous cultures included) saw the self as interdependent and interconnected to each other and life.

Yin Shu and Shihui Han (2008), from the University of Peking explain that:

Different thinking styles in Westerners and Chinese (analytic vs. holistic) lead to disparities between the two cultures not only in perception and attention but also in high-level social cognition such as self-representation. Most Western philosophers discussed the self by focusing
on personal self-identity, whereas Chinese philosophers emphasized the relation between the self and others. (p. 1799)

Differences in the concept of self have influenced the way people perceive their work in relation to others and the world in general. From a non-Western perspective, when actions are perceived as affecting the whole, feeling connected with the cosmos, selfish conducts seem foolish (Dalai Lama, 1999), and we act with a warm heart and selflessness. When, on the contrary, we feel as a separate entity, oppression, and abuse can take place.

In this chapter a literature review regarding the most relevant aspects of the concept of Self was done in order to explore its possible implications in the conception and exercise of Ally work and the decolonizing process.

**Self in the East.**

According to Watts (1953), “Oriental philosophy is at root, not concerned with conceptions, ideas, opinions, and forms of words at all. It is concerned with a transformation of experience itself” (p. 25). Pedersen also explained that identity in Eastern cultures is understood as a more fluid concept “interrelated, interdependence and based on experiential evidence and intuitive logic” (p. 367).

Yin Shu and Shihui Han (2008) for example explained that the highest achievement of a person in the East, during Confucius time, was to become a sage, and the highest achievement of a sage was the “identification with the universe” (p. 1801). Ho (1993), stated that in Confucianism, social actions came from perceptions of relationship with the other, and therefore to a large extent, identity was defined by the social role overriding personality. He further emphasized that individuals were not regarded as separate beings, but rather as
members of the larger collective identity. Ho called this way of self-perception Relational Identity and wrote:

Each member partakes of the attributes of the group. Each shares the pride that the group claims, and bears the burden of its collective humiliation ... the self in Confucianism is a subdued self. It is conditioned to respond to perceptions, not of its own needs and aspirations, but of social requirements and obligations. (p. 117-118)

Taoism also supports the idea of a Self connected with the universe, and explained it in terms not of social interactions as Confucius, but as the interplay of relationships between five elements: fire, earth, metal, water and wood, that allowed the manifestation and holding of a being. Within Taoism, the Self cannot be known, only experienced. “The knower does not say, the sayer does not know” (Tao De Ching, in Graham, 1989, p. 220).

Within the Eastern philosophies, Buddhism presents a unique understanding, that of Selflessness. Buddhist texts explain we are all “One”, manifesting in multiple forms, just as waves arise from the ocean, concluding that what we call Self is a transitory and endless process.

As a Buddhist practitioner this understanding of Self is one that I ponder and has obviously influenced this research as well as the way in which I have adopted the artist/social justice/decolonizer/ally role, and have made meaning of Chepwapisk’s teachings and life.
Who is the Storyteller and how is the story made?

When did it all begin?

Is there an end?

Taking self inventory

Then the journey
**Buddhism and the Selfless theory.**

*Anatta*, non-self or selflessness, stands at the core of Buddhist philosophy. Together with impermanence and interdependent origination they constitute the pillars that explain human suffering, the causes of suffering, and the way to get liberated from the endless cycle of delusion, which creates suffering.


> The doctrine of anatta, selflessness, is at the heart of the Buddha’s teaching, and it ties together metaphysical, ethical, meditative, and devotional facets of Buddhism. Like many spiritual and philosophical traditions, Buddhism rests on the idea that wisdom is liberating, but unlike most other traditions teaches that the wisdom that must be sought is not about oneself, but about one’s selflessness.

(http://docs4.chomikuj.pl/1510824993,PL,0,0,THEORY-AND-PRACTICE-OF-ANATTA.pdf)

In order to understand anatta, it is important to take a look at the concept of *Interdependent Origination* that explains that nothing exists independently of anything else (Stcherbatsky, 1962). This implies that a self can only exist in relation to others, and not as an unchanging or permanent individual entity, concluding that self is rather a witness that cannot be known but only experienced.

Selflessness is very difficult to understand as it doesn’t seem to fit our daily experience. According to Fremantle (2001), the Buddha did not deny the identity that refers to the person. She explains that

> There is, in everyday experience, a quite neutral sense of being oneself,
which is not grasping, possessive, or divisive. In this sense, self is just a conventional term, a label, like one’s name...with no special emotional charge or philosophical significance, any more than when we speak of a table or a chair. (p 33)

Fremantle (2001) further explains that the problem with self arises when we conclude “there must be an essence that makes us unique and separate from others”. Then we enter the Samsaric life (life with suffering due to mental habits) with a solidifying tendency, which is based on “self-centeredness, relating everything to oneself as the center of one’s world” (p.34).

Buddha’s teachings explains that assuming the existence of a self can only cause trouble arising from attachment to the ‘I, me or mine’. This attachment brings egoistic grasping to deeper and subtle levels and is the cause of all the suffering that is experienced (Fremantle, 2001).

In Buddhism living beings are just a temporary manifestation of various elements in a continuous state of change, just as the ocean, which is composed of uncountable drops of water, never remains static, creating endless waves that rise, peak and dissolve.

In his poem “The Old Mendicant” Thich Naht Han presents his view of this endless transformation from which we are part.

Being rock, being gas, being mist, being Mind,
being the mesons traveling among galaxies
at the speed of light,
you have come here, my beloved...
You have manifested yourself
as trees, grass, butterflies, single-celled beings,
and as chrysanthemums.
But the eyes with which you looked at me this morning
tell me you have never died. (Thich Naht Han in Joana Macy and Brown, 1998, p. 161)

Fremantle (2001) also explains that Buddhism states the existence of an essence or potentiality, which is called the Tathagatagarbha or Buddha-nature, which manifests as Bodhichita or awaken mind-heart. And comments that although mentioning the existence of the Buddha nature could sound like the existence of some kind of entity, this really goes beyond all concepts and cannot be described.

Although sometimes Buddhism has been understood as presenting a nihilistic view, Buddhist teachings explain that when it is possible to see beyond the delusion of the individual, it is possible to experience that which is not subject to birth and death. Entering a state of selflessness is not a nihilistic view for Buddhism as it explains that when the self is transcended, a “being or presence is still there, the world is still there, and the experience is still there” (Fremantle, 2001).

According Graham, (1989) in Buddhism we can understand the self as the manifestation and presence of actions and states of being. In this sense, “when a person dies and is truly gone, there remains only the accumulated result of all his/her actions-the karma that will continue to work out its effects on the lives of other sentient beings” (p. 121).

Buddhist texts would refer to the five skandhas as the constituent processes that allow the delusion of separateness to exist. The terms used to describe this skandhas are connected to self-grasping “not as theory, but as a deeply felt, instinctive conviction” (Fremantle, 2001, p.37).
**Skandas.**

The Buddha proposed a metaphysical view of the self that consists of five skandhas. In Sanskrit the word skandha means, “aggregate”. Various schools of Buddhism interpret the skandhas in somewhat different ways, but generally the first skandha refers to the physical form; the second includes our sensations; the third relates to perceptions; the fourth to mental formations and the fifth to consciousness (O’Brien, B. n/d)

Sogyal Rimpoche (2002) said:

Once we have a physical body, we also have what are known as the five skandhas — the aggregates that compose our whole mental and physical existence. They are the constituents of our experience, the support for the grasping of ego and also the basis for the suffering of Samsara. (p.254)

According to Trungpa (2002) the First skandha is Ignorance-Form, where ignorance is understood as not perceiving and reacting to one’s projections. The Second skandha is Sensation-Feeling. In this skandha the sensation of the open space starts to create solidity through grasping. The Third skandha is the continuation after sensation where judgment is born. “Whether we should react for or against or indifferently is automatically determined by this bureaucracy of feeling and perception” (p. 127). The Fourth skandha- Concept- appears to “protect and deceive oneself” (p.127) by labeling things and events. It is in this skandha that intellectual speculations start to appear in order to confirm or interpret the self as a separate entity. Finally in the Fifth skandha- Consciousness- “the intuitive intelligence of the second skandha, the energy of the Third and the intellectualization of the Fourth combined produce thoughts and emotions” (p.128).
Interdependence.

One of the most important concepts of Buddhist philosophy and one that is also present in all non-Western approaches is that of Interdependence, which as noted, is intimately connected with the understanding of selflessness. According to the Buddha's teachings the attributes we give to the phenomenal world are the constructs of the mind and are not intrinsic to the object. Therefore reality appears differently to different persons based on their perceptions.

Speaking at a symposium titled “Philosophical questions on reality and Interdependence” (n.d) the Fourteenth Dalai Lama said:

We may comprehend this principle, also called dependent origination, on different levels, beginning with that of causality, the law of cause and effect accepted by all four schools of Buddhist philosophy. There is another way to understand this principle, to see it in relation to the fact that a whole depends on its parts. Indeed, any existent thing is considered to be a whole, that is, composed of parts. Since it is made up of parts, it depends upon them. Its very existence depends on its parts and it cannot exist in an autonomous or independent manner (http://hhdl.dharmakara.net/hhdlquotes4.html#interdependence).

According to Buddhism, the attributes we ascribe to the phenomena are not intrinsic to the object itself, but they are created by our mind as they pass through the filter of our perceptions. Therefore objects do not possess solidity or permanence. Rather they are vacuous. That is absent of the independent autonomy of existence.

Through the concept of Dependent Origination of the Madhyamika (Middle
Way) school of thought, I was able to understand “that all things and events arise in dependence on a complex web of interrelated causes and conditions” (Dalai Lama, 1999, p. 37), and that the whole exists because it has parts. I realized that I am because others were.

Buddhism also explained to me that that things and events arise as verbal imputations given in accordance to characteristics such as shape, function, specific parts etc. My mental formations arise in dependence to my sense organs, perception and process of conceptualization.

This realization, resulting from years of observing my own thoughts and actions, was elegantly explained by the Dalai Lama (1999), who said that:

The close connection between how we perceive ourselves in relation to the world we inhabit and our behavior in response to it means that our understanding of phenomena is crucially significant. Indeed, when we consider matter, we start to see that we cannot finally separate out any phenomena from the context of other phenomena. We can only speak in terms of relationships...We cannot understand the concept of perception except in the context of an indefinitely complex series of cause and conditions... our individual well-being is intimately connected both with that of all others and with the environment within which we live. It also becomes apparent that our very action, our very deed, word and thought, no matter how slight or inconsequential it may seem, has an implication not only on ourselves but for all others too (p. 39).

*Karma.*

The concept of karma in Buddhism is very important when talking about
selflessness and actions. Thich Naht Nah, a Zen master and social justice activist, compares Karma to a silo in which mental seeds exist waiting to be watered to grow. This growth is the ripening of actions. In this case, ripening referred to the result or consequences produced by the chain reaction, of our thoughts, speech and actions.

My basic understanding of karma is that action always present consequences and that I am responsible for what I do and will eventually experience the consequences, good or bad or neutral. Thursby (1999) explains it in the following way:

The general assumption in the notion of karma is that whatever action you intend or actually carry out will reflect your present character and will determine your future destiny to an extent that you may not be able to anticipate at the time when you entertain or perform the act itself. In short, the idea of karma places a very high value on the cultivation of careful and consistent patterns of thought and behavior. (p. 373)

_Liberation._

Liberation or _Sunyata_ within a Buddhist context refers not to self-liberation, but rather liberation “from” the self. Many authors, such as Fremantle, 2001; Thich Naht Han (1998), Dalai Lama (1999); Trungpa (1984), have insisted strongly on this. They have explained that liberation is the letting go of the grasping and clinging. Fremantle (2001) for example wrote “emptying oneself of illusion, concepts, and imaginary constructs of all kind, [and] eventually [through] the process of letting go, we arrive at the experience known as emptiness _sunyata_, [and] limitless concern for everything that exists” (p. 37,
39). Through this process it is possible to perceive the brilliance and clarity in which phenomena appear. This is what Buddhist teachings understand as wisdom, concluding that Awakening, Buddhahood, Sunyata or Enlightenment is a state of sustained awareness of interdependence, insubstantiality and selflessness.

Achieving liberation from the self is a personal quest and requires only a constant vigilance of the mind processes or what is commonly called a “mindfulness practice”. To this respect Fremantle (2001) states:

> These approaches are not imposed upon us by any external authority; they correspond to our needs and capacities and develop naturally out of our own point of view and our own attitudes toward the path... Self-liberation is the spontaneous realization that there has never really been anything else. (p. 40)

*The Bodhisattva - spiritual warrior.*

According to Buddhism, *liberation from suffering* is achieved through the recognition of selflessness and the manifestation of an enlightened mind-heart or Bodhichitta. Although enlightenment takes only an instant of recognition, the path to achieve stability of mind to sustain such perception requires much practice and guidance. The guide needs to be someone who has walked the path and has a heart wide open. These figures are called Bodhisattvas.

The word *Bodhisattva* comes from the word *Bodhi* that means awake, but not all are fully awake. There are different levels in the path to liberation and it is possible to find Bodhisattvas at different levels of liberation, yet all share an awaken heart, willing to help others in their search.
Bodhisattvas are “those who are brave and convinced of the powerful reality of the tathagata-nature which exist in themselves... the path of the brave warrior who trusts in his potentials to complete the journey” writes Trungpa (1973, p 170).

According to Buddhist texts, the Bodhisattva path consists of six activities or “paramitas” which are: generosity, discipline, patience, energy, meditation and knowledge.

Trungpa (1973) explained the six paramitas in the following way:

- Generosity does not only mean to be kind and giving but transcending “irritation and self-defensiveness” (p. 171). It means doing what is required at every moment without expectations or judgments.

- Discipline does not mean to follow laws or patterns blindly, because “if a bodhisattva is completely selfless, a completely open person, then he will act according to openness, and will not have to follow rules” (p.173).

- Patience involves the skillful mean of not expecting anything. It refers to being able to feel the open space never fearing any situation. “Whatever comes- be it destructive, chaotic, creative, welcoming or inviting- the bodhisattva is never disturbed, never shocked, because he is aware of the space between the situation and himself... and a flowing relationship with the world” (p.175).

- Energy refers to never missing opportunities for embracing with joy executing enlightened actions. “One never sees situations as uninteresting or stagnant at all, because the bodhisattva’s view of life is extremely open-minded, intensely interested” (p.176).

- Knowledge or Prajna, is the cutting through confusion by transcending
the ego achieving the capacity to see things “as they are”. Prajna is “cutting through of conflicting emotions-the attitudes that one has toward oneself” (p.178).
Inside, outside… another border

No head, Heart asleep

Consumed and consuming
**Self in the West.**

Western philosophy can be divided into four main eras: the Ancient, Medieval, Modern, and Contemporary. The Ancient area goes from the Greeks to the fall of Rome and emergence of Christianity, and includes philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. The Medieval period goes as far as the late 15th century with the Renaissance and includes among many others the work of St Augustine’s *Confessions* in which he inquires what it means to be a person (Juárez, 2008). The Modern era includes the philosophical work of the 17th, 18th and 19th century in which reason was highlighted, and includes the work of Kant, Descartes and Rousseau, among many others. Finally Contemporary philosophy encompasses the philosophical work of the 20th century up to the present day. This includes poststructuralist works such as those of Foucault and Derrida; and Said’s postcolonial work.

Understanding that the body of knowledge in Western philosophy is vast, I will only present in this section some of the most important philosophical ideas that I believe should be explored for the Ally work, including some of the views of self that I believe have influenced the academic world and have contributed to the process of colonization, as well as those which are now a part of the education system and are not helping prepare students for Ally work.

**A Separate Soul.**

What we commonly know as Western thought finds its origins in ancient Greece, Rome and the emergence of the Christian world where the idea of a separate soul that transcends life is founded. Although the idea of the soul goes back to pre-Socratic thought, it was with Plato’s dialogues that the separation of
the soul from body was first argued. Furthermore, he postulated the body to be an obstacle for wisdom, therefore in need of purification and eventually to let go of the material body, transcending through death. Plato explains:

The body presents us with innumerable distractions, because of the necessity of looking after it; and again, if any illnesses assail it, they too hamper us in our pursuit of truth. The body fills us with emotions of love, fear, desire, and fear, with all kinds of fantasy and nonsense, so that in very truth it really doesn’t give us a chance, as they say, to ever think of anything at all...we are slaves in its service; and so...we have no time for philosophy. Even if we do get some time off from looking after it...it keeps on turning up everywhere in our search, and causes disturbance and confusion, and thoroughly dumbfounds us...if we are ever going to have pure knowledge of anything, we must get rid of the body, survey things alone in themselves by means of the soul herself alone (S. Ann. 2006, http://voices.yahoo.com/platos-phaedo-summary-immortality-the-142719.html?cat=2).

Plato also distinguished three types of souls existing in the human being. One is the appetite, which lives in the gut and is related with feelings; the second is the spirit or courage, which lives in the heart and relates to willing; and the third one reason, which is immortal, wise, and resides in the brain and is related to thinking (S. Ann, 2006). This multiple separation of the soul is one of the most important influences in Western thinking, since most philosophers kept the distinction between thinking, feeling, and willing, as a way to explain how we incorporate, intellect, volition and desire into our lives.
Plato’s three souls postulate, also laid the basis to see justice better over injustice. He explains that:

true justice is a kind of good health, attainable only through the harmonious cooperative effort of the three souls. In an unjust person, on the other hand, the disparate parts are in perpetual turmoil, merely coexisting with each other in an unhealthy, poorly functioning, disintegrated personality (Kamerling, G, 1997, 2011, http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/2g.htm).

The belief in a separate eternal soul, “emphasiz[ing] distinctions between the self as a subject (the ‘I,’) and the self as an object (the ‘Me’),” (James, W. 1989 in Yin Shu and Shihui Han, 2008, p.1801), still remains as one of the main ideas that characterize Western thinking.

**Reason.**

The concept of reason has been defined as “the power of comprehending, inferring, or thinking especially in orderly rational ways” (Merriam Webster Dictionary). According to Kompridis, N. (2000) it is “the human capacity for making sense of things, for establishing and verifying facts, and changing or justifying practices, institutions, and beliefs based on new or existing information” (p. 271). Steinworth, (2007) explains that the Cartesian self is:

the capability of deliberate judgment; it is the individual considered in her capacity of judging...the self is only constituted by judging and by examining thoughts and feelings to determine whether they are to be accepted or rejected. of inspiration or ideas are different from the action
of examining them...[where] thoughts (in distinction with thinking) are objects of the self, not constituents. (p. 37)

Although Western philosophy has many philosophers and theorists who reject in one way or another the idea of a universal reason, this idea prevails as one of Western thought (Steinvorth, U., 2009). According to Steinvorth, U. (2009), “the Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., started science, politics, and a form of rationality that have become models for the West” (p. 61). He explained that for Plato reason was the faculty that enabled us to know and is the motor behind action. Further on he states that for Plato and Aristotle “reason in its full active form was a capacity owned only by male Greeks; its lack in the barbarians entitled the Greek to enslave them” (p. 61). Further more he explains that considering reason as the part of the soul with which calculation was possible had prompted Plato to conclude that, “the higher qualities of the mind are different from desire” (Steinvorth, U., 2007. p .6), positioning reason over all other soul characteristics and therefore the most important to develop and care for.

Steinvorth, (2007), also notes that following on Plato’s work, Aristotle went on and further differentiated between two types of reasons: a passive and an active one, and concluded that human beings were rational animals. Aristotle emphasized reason over any other characteristic, and defined *eudaimonia* or the capacity of well being as living in harmony with reason.

Understanding reason to be a male characteristic can be traced back to the beginnings of philosophical thought, where women thinking capacities were reduced to a connection with nature and “what rational knowledge transcends, dominates or simply leaves behind”. (Llyod, G. 1984, p.2)
Later on with colonization this same attribute was given to Indigenous people with the idea of “Nature as left behind by Reason” (Llyod, G. 1984, p. 59).

This patriarchal vision allowed and became an excuse to mistreat Indigenous people, and impose ways that disempowered women. Rationality and the concept of self are closely interwoven since it developed two incompatible conceptions of the self. Regarding these two conceptions of self, Steinvorth (2007) writes:

This concept was one of Europe's seventeenth century that developed two incompatible conceptions of the self: a Cartesian conception and a Lockean one that later merged with utilitarian rationality. Though the utilitarian approach has prevailed, it is the Cartesian conception that best preserves the values of the West. (p. 4-5)

**Dualism.**

Descartes suggested that the body works like a machine, with material components separate from the mind, which is non-material and do not follow the laws of nature. This dualism in which the body and mind act in different ways sometimes affecting or controlling each other, caused a shift from a God-oriented perspective to an anthropocentric view, establishing human reasoning over spiritual realms. With his statement “Cogito ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am), Descartes became the father of Modern philosophy, and his ideas have been crucial in the development of Western thought.

**Noble Savage.**

The term Noble Savage was first introduced in literature to expresses the
Other and was identified with the image of "nature's gentleman", of 18th-century. Due to colonization, new founding influenced the European mind and the idea of the Noble Savage was created based on an illusory idea of Native societies. Novel Savage became also a rhetorical devise to disassociate from what was viewed as romantic privitivism (Moore, 2002).

The idea of a Noble Salvage has contributed to the development of stereotypes, which have simplified the complexities of Indigenous identity and their lives. Ascribing to the natives a life of constant happiness and freedom, the real conventions, traditions, and epistemologies by which they lived were ignored. To the present this image still has an important weight for the visual representation of Indigenous people on the media.

This stereotype was used, and still is used to contrast what is considered “primitive” society with a “modern” one, where the idea of blissful relationship with nature diminished the hard work, intelligence and technological resources developed by Indigenous groups. The use of this stereotyping has not only set a false image of what it is Indigenous, but has also supported discriminatory policies that have created “displacement, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of ‘official’ and fastasmic knowledges” (Bhabha, 1986, p. 169).

**Poststructuralism and the Deconstruction of Self.**

Modernity, with the Enlightenment, tried to describe the world based on reason and objectivity assuming a truth that can be uncovered. Yet within the postmodern world, reason became subject to question and the humanist idea of a Mind capable of knowing the world collapsed, opening a way for:
(1) an elevation of text and language as the fundamental phenomena of existence, (2) the application of literary analysis to all phenomena, (3) a questioning of reality and representation, (4) a critique of metanarratives, (5) an argument against method and evaluation, (6) a focus upon power relations and hegemony, (7) and a general critique of Western institutions and knowledge (Kunzar, 2008, p.78)

According to Gandhi, (1998), postmodern philosophers such as Derrida and Foucault believed the Cartesian philosophy of identity was an “ethically unsustainable omission of the Other” (p.39) and that “the all-knowing and self-sufficient Cartesian subject violently negate[d] material and historical alterity/Otherness in its narcissistic desire to always see the world in its own self-image” (p.39).

Foucault focused on analyzing discursive practices in terms of their history, looking to show “how the development of knowledge was intertwined with the mechanisms of (political) power” (http://www.philosopher.org.uk/poststr.htm).

Foucault’s work on power and discourse, and Derrida’s on deconstruction and Other helped destabilized the dualist logic by showing the dependency that privilege has on its counterpart. Their poststructuralist and postmodern discourses offered “the possibility of knowing differently--of knowing difference in and for itself” (Gandhi, L. 1998, p.40, italics by the author).

Based on text structures and language, Derrida presented the way by which language can shape meaning and the self. He explained that hierarchical opposing dualities exist in text, but their deconstruction shows all texts have
multiple interpretations, and that “certainty in textual analyses becomes impossible” (http://www.philosopher.org.uk/poststr.htm).

Derrida became one of the most important authors sustaining the idea of self as an ongoing construct of language. He wrote:

An identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures ... in whatever manner one invents the story of a construction of a self, the autos, or the ipse, it is always imagined that the one who writes should know how to say I. (Derrida, 1998, p. 29)

**Postmodern Discursive Psychology**

Within the realm of psychology, we find that, in contrast with Descartes’s notion of self, postmodern discursive psychology proposes that the self is the result of actions, and more specifically language. Some authors like Hsu and Roth, (2010) explain that language is the very tool that allows both overcoming and keeping the self. Furthermore they state that due to the fact that language reproduces and transforms itself, discursive psychology describes language as mechanism for people to ascribe and resist particular identities to themselves and each other.

Discursive psychology considers that every higher psychological function is created in language (Lee and Roth, 2004). It explains that there is no identity independent of language, concluding that language and consciousness are the products of social relations. Furthermore, discursive psychology argues that language is the principle by which life is organized and it is the only way to articulate experience, identity, and beliefs. Although Language as the site for
identity construction does not defeat the Cartesian mind body divide in the western tradition, it moves ‘knowing’ back out into culture by placing language and identity there.

Benwell and Stokoe (2006) have also stated that “identity inhabits not minds, but the public and accountable realms of discourse, [and it] is performed, constructed, enacted or produced, moment-to-moment, in everyday conversations ”(p. 49). In addition they explain that because identity is constructed, reproduced and enacted in language, people use interpretive repertoires to display and validate points of views and opinions, which reinforce their different identities.

Identities are not fixed and solid, they are constructed in relation to the other and therefore context plays a major role in the study of identity. Identity and selfhood are constructed in social situations like interviews or through writing. Identity is the outcome of activity and therefore changes according to different situations.

Through the understanding of the concept of identity as culturally constructed it is possible to see the influence that parenting and schooling have on individuals. To accept the premise that identity is culturally constructed can have great impact in the work of an Ally propelling her or him to understand the construction of personal beliefs and to accept as equal the construction of the others.

Postcolonial Self

Postcolonialism has been seen as a way to resist the destruction, trauma and abuse that came with colonization and that many seem to have forgotten.
According to Gandhi (1998), postcolonialism is “a disciplinary project devoted to the academic task of revisiting, remembering and, crucially, interrogating the colonial past” (p. 3). She explains “memory is the necessary and sometimes hazardous bridge between colonialism and the question of cultural identity” and quotes Bhabha who expressed that remembering “is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present” (p.8).

While Said is considered the first proponent of postcolonialism with the publication of his work Orientalism in 1978, his work was influenced by the post-structuralist work of Derrida and Foucault and their critique of Western civilization (Gandhi, 1998). Therefore similar to Derrida’s understanding of dualities existing in texts, postcolonial theory recognizes “that colonial discourse typically rationalizes itself through rigid oppositions such as maturity/immaturity, civilization/barbarism, developed/developing, progressive/primitive” (Gandhi, 1998, p.31).

Over the last decade, postcolonial studies have emerged along disciplines that look to represent interests of women, gay/lesbian or other minorities. According to Karavanta, M. & Morgan, N. (2008) “feminist and postcolonial theory alike began with an attempt to simply invert prevailing hierarchies of gender/culture/race, and they have each progressively welcomed the poststructuralist invitation to refuse the binary oppositions upon which patriarchal/colonial authority constructs itself” (p. 82). Furthermore these authors explain “a productive area of collaboration between postcolonialism and
feminism presents itself in the possibility of combined offensives against the aggressive myth of both imperial and nationalist masculinity” (p. 97).

In regards to power and knowledge, Postcolonial theory has invoked Foucault’s work on power, to “expose the hidden contiguity between knowledge and power” (Karavanta, M. & Morgan, N., 2008, p. 42). Said work explores how knowledge is transformed through power and advocates moving away from predetermined systems of knowledge. According to (Karavanta, M. & Morgan, N. (2008):

While Said listens carefully to Foucault’s influential account of power, he is ultimately more interested in questions of knowledge or--more specifically--in exploring and critiquing the conditions under which knowledge might be transformed and vitiated through the contagion of power. (p. 74)

Furthermore Karavanta, M. & Morgan, N. (2008) explains that Said “seems to invoke the anarchist maxim, that power corrupts, to argue that power is especially corrupting when it comes into contact with knowledge” (p. 74).

Another important aspect of postcolonial theory is the exploration of the condition of hybridism and exile. Karavanta, M. & Morgan, N. (2008) explain Derrida “paved the ways for the intellectual world to think about the exile condition in a postcolonial and global age” (p. 4), and that both Derrida and Said had “a profound awareness of the hybrid nature of their experience, both going so far as to use the work “hybrid” by way of describing themselves” (p.3). Furthermore they maintained “the question open to engage the political and philosophical condition of exile and dis-belonging, and the political and philosophical imperatives of hospitality and friendship” (p. 3).
From the earth I have come with my Medicine Bundle

For a journey beyond the Stars

Spirit is the essence

I honor you father Sun
**Indigenous Epistemologies and the Self.**

Over the time I have spent in Indigenous communities in Mexico the United States, and Canada, I have experienced that even though each one holds different beliefs and understandings, they share some commonalities regarding the understanding of self, which are similar in many ways to the relational self held in the East.

Many Indigenous writers Battiste (2009); Baskin (2005); Cajete (1994); and Duran & Duran (1995) among others have also noticed this similarity and have emphasized interconnectedness as an important aspect of Indigenous epistemologies. Baskin (2005) for example said, “I am connected to my family, community, Mi’kmaq Nation, everything on Mother Earth and the spirit world. To divide any of these realities into separate categories is a dishonor to Indigenous ways of thinking” (p.32).

The notion of self within Indigenous people is expressed as being intimately related with the universe in a spiritual way and seems at moments enmeshed in it. In Carol Locust (1988) words, “as Native people, we cannot separate our spiritual teachings from our learning, nor can we separate our beliefs about who, and what we are from values and our behaviors” (in Baskin, 2005, p. 32).

Although today it is common to use the word Indigenous to refer to the people that were of the land prior to colonization, it is important to understand that the word Indigenous comes from the word Indigenist (Indigenista). The Interamerican Indigenist Institute first coined this term in 1940 in Mexico (Becker, 1995), during an Indian Conference aiming to reorganize the life and cultural traditions of Indigenous people in America. Yet defining Indigenous
identity has been and is still today a difficult, heavily politically and economically loaded task, since ethnicity can be described in terms of relation and mode of consciousness, as well as linked to biology, tradition, place, and sense of self.

*Colonization in Canada-an attempt to destroy Indigenous Identity*

In 1830, the Canadian government decided to alter its Indian policy, from using Indigenous people as military allies, in an attempt for assimilation to the Western civilization. In the 17th century, Catholic and Anglican missionaries established in North America schools and Aboriginals were asked to undertake the task of removing Indigenous people “off their rude habits of salvage life… [and]… embrace Christianity and civilization” (Wilson, 1986, p. 65). Also residential schools were created in order to “cultivate European values of sobriety, frugality, industry and enterprise” (Wilson, 1986, p. 66), and extinguish Indigenous languages and epistemologies. Children were forced to leave their families in order to be ‘well educated’ and unlearn their language and culture to “break [Indigenous children] of their old instincts inherited from their fathers, and to make them care for a civilized and respectable life” (Wilson, 1986, p. 78-79). Colonizers dismissed Indigenous cultures as irrelevant, and residential schools instead of ‘educating’ Indigenous children abused them. According to Barman, Herbert and McCaskill, (1986) “50% of the children who passed through these schools did not live to benefit from the education they had received therein” (p. 8).

Furthermore children that survived residential schools did not receive an education that would enable them participate in the dominant culture. Instead instruction was basically focused on developing basic skill to prepare them to
work as maids, farmer or alike (Kirkness and Bowman, 1992). Residential schools also disrupt Indigenous self-identity by enforcing extreme concerns about morality and modesty. Sexual abuse among many other brutalities committed to Indigenous youth in residential schools, has been heavily reported. These damaged Indigenous self-esteem and identity.

Colonization fragmented many Indigenous communities in Canada, through relocations, schooling, language and cultural policies and laws, as well as destruction of habitat and restrictions on traditional means of survival such as hunting, fishing and gathering.

**First Nations defense of Indigenous Identity**

Although sociology explains that ethnicity presents a conflict based on relationships that are reinforced by a common language, self-subscription to a group, biology and shared cultural norms and values (Becker, 1995), the question of who can be called Indigenous poses a problem in the development of self Indigenous identity which has been mediated by outside Western structures since colonization.

Indigenous people have contested Western views and have looked for ways by which to self-establish Indigenous identity. One of these approaches has been the World Council of Indigenous People (WCIP) self-identification policy, passed on in 1997. Through this policy Indigenous people have resolved that only Indigenous people can define themselves as so. Since that date, the Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP), and the United Nations Working Group (ILO) have both adopted the policy.

Although the policy adopted by the World Council of Indigenous People
has granted the right of self-identification to all Indigenous people, it has also raised problems regarding who the treaties will benefit, and consequently over the construction and definition of Indigenous identity. “Requiring strict, definitional standards could exclude some indigenous groups from the very protections they need and would also conform to state-centric, bureaucratic decision-making practices, which are unethical to most indigenous belief systems” (Corntassel, 2003, p. 76).

Hilary Weaver (2001), in the article *Indigenous Identity, what is it, and who really has it?* states:

Indigenous Identity is truly a complex and somewhat controversial topic. There is little agreement on precisely what constitutes an indigenous identity, how to measure it, and who truly has it. Indeed there is not even a consensus on an appropriate term. Are we talking about Indians, American Indians, Natives, Native Americans, indigenous people, or First Nations people? Are we talking about Sioux or Lakota? Navajo or Dine? Chippewa, Objiway, or Anishnabe? Once we get that sorted out, are we talking about race, ethnicity, cultural identity, tribal identity, acculturation, enculturation, bicultural identity, multicultural identity, or some other form of identity? (p. 240)

Weaver (2001) further explains that identity can be a combination of race, class, education, region, religion and gender and the influences of these factors over time are subject to change in a person. Yet it is true that those who belong to the same culture share a “similar conceptual map and way of
interpreting language” (p.240). She points out that identities are always “fragmented, multiply constructed, and intersected, sometimes in conflicting ways” (p. 240). As a Lakota woman she prefers to approach identity with subjectivity.

With a story about basketball tournament, Weaver (2001) exemplifies clearly the complexities of determining who is and who is not an Indigenous person. Her story says that that during a basketball tournament the Lakota felt impressed by the Navajo team and began to question if they were not Indigenous and should be disqualified. Then when the Navajo observed the Lakota practice, they noticed some players had light skin and short hair and might well be white guys disguised as Navajo and should be disqualified. In order to clarify doubts they agreed that the Native identity of both teams should be established. While the Lakota captaining suggested everyone should show their enrollment card, the Navajo refused considering the cards the result of colonialism, and proposed to determine identity based on language. Since many of the Lakota could not speak the Lakota language, they went back and forth proposing ways to prove identity until it was decided not to grant the championship to either of them.

The problem of who can be called Indigenous is and has been politically loaded and complex as group identities have changed in time and place. According to Taiaiake Alfred (cited in Corntassel 2003) “the dilemma over ‘who is indigenous’ has become increasingly politicized as indigenous peoples have attained a distinct legal standing under international law. Consequently international organizations, host states, non-governmental organizations and researchers have each attempted to develop their own definitional standards of native peoples” (p. 77).
In the case of Canada, these definitions have changed over time, but have inevitably caused harm to Indigenous people. Segregation and difference in education and opportunities for Indigenous people have been supported by many of these definitions and are still today the subject of criticism by Indigenous people.
Crossing the border
Meeting the other... disguised as acceptance
Politically correct to not reveal the face
Be aware of such encounters
**Canadian Government Definition.**

According to the Canadian government there are two types of Indigenous people, those who are registered with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) or Status Indians, and those who are not. “Status Indians are people who are registered with the federal government as Indians, according to the terms of the Indian Act” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada,)

The most important requirement for registration within the Indian Act is to be a descendant of a member of an Indian band in Canada. Yet this definition does not include non-status Indians and Metis people who consider themselves Indigenous based on their culture and heritage.

Jean Barman (2007) explains that:

“The Indian Act, 1876, restricted the role of the Department of Indian Affairs to indigenous people defined as having status by virtue of male descent: to be Indian was to have an Indian father. The many women with families by newcomer men were left to their own devices, their offspring generally being termed ‘half-breeds,’ a word almost always derogatory in its connotation. (p. 3)

Determining who can be accepted as an Indigenous person in Canada brings a stance of inevitable racism, especially because the definition regulates people’s rights.

**Indigenous Identity in the Academic World.**

For the purpose of this dissertation, not only the Canadian government
definition of Indigenous was important to know, but also those of various academic scholars. In a review of literature Corntassel (2003) presents Franke Wilmer’s (1993) definition as the first academic attempt of defining the term Indigenous. He states that an Indigenous is a person:

1-with tradition-based cultures;
2-who were politically autonomous before colonization;
3-who in the aftermath of colonization and/or decolonization, continues to struggle for the preservation of their cultural integrity, economic self-reliance, and political independence by resisting the assimilationist policies of nation-states. (cited in Corntassel, 2003, p. 78)

Then he presents the work of Wilmer and Alfred (2004), who state that Indigenous people:

are descendant from original inhabitants of the geographic areas they continue to occupy; wish to live in conformity with their continuously evolving cultural traditions; and do not now control their political destiny and consequently, are frequently subjected to policies arising from the cultural hegemony originally imposed by an ‘outside’ force. (p. 78)

Further on he introduces the reader to the work of James Anaya, who defines Indigenous people as:

the living descendants of pre-invasion inhabitants of lands now dominated by others... They are indigenous because their ancestral roots are embedded in the lands in which they live, or would like to live, much more deeply than the roots of more powerful sectors of society living in the same lands or in close proximity. Furthermore, they are to the extent they comprise distinct communities with a
continuity of existence and identity that links them to communities,
tribes or nations of their ancestral past. (p. 79)

Corntassel (2003), also presents the work of Fred Riggs (2001) whose
definition includes: “cultural level, ranging from primitive to more complex
society; historical sequence (age), who came first and who followed; political
position (power), i.e. marginalized vs. dominant communities; geographic areas
(place)” (p. 80-81).

Finally Corntassel (2003) presents Kingsbury’s (1998) constructivist
approach, which proposes the requirements for determining Indigenous identity.
These requirements consist of: “self-identification as a distinct ethnic group;
historical experience of, or contingent vulnerability to, severe disruption,
dislocation or exploitation; long connection with the region; and the wish to
retain a distinct identity” (p. 81).

Furthermore he states that Kingsbury’s (1998) work is very important
because:

[it] takes the international concept of ‘indigenous people’ not as one
sharply defined by universally applicable criteria, but as embodying a
continuous process in which claims and practices in numerous specific
cases are abstracted in the wider institutions of international society,
then made specific again at the moment of application in the political,
legal and social processes of particular cases and societies. (cited in
Corntassel 2003p. 81)

Based on the definitions that have just been presented it is clear that
determining who is Indigenous is a very complex issue that holds important legal,
political and economical connotations. Even in the case of using first arrival
rights, nomadic life, migrations and change of boundaries present difficult problems to resolve. As a Mexican woman living in Canada, I have personally experienced the need to explore a more fluid understanding of identity; research the notion of self from an Indigenous epistemological point of view; and redefine myself in terms of racial identity.

**Visual Representations of Indigenous notion of Self.**

Since Indigenous people have an important connection to visual expressions, their understanding of self has been visually presented in many different ways. One of them is the Medicine Wheel. Wenger-Nabigon (2010), in her study about the Cree Medicine Wheel presents the intimate relationship between Cree people and “Mother Earth, the Spirit World, and relationships with the Creator” (p. 147). She highlights the importance that exists in adolescent development with the learning about self in relationship with the others, and concludes that:

The Medicine Wheel can provide a “description of human developmental theory from the perspective of traditional Indigenous knowledge. The Cree Medicine Wheel provides theories about different stages of human development, appropriate developmental tasks of each stage, and knowledge about assets that facilitate positive development at each stage. The Cree Medicine Wheel illuminates the role of relationships with humans and all of Creation, the role of spirituality, developmental plasticity, diversity, the interconnectedness of “nested environments”, and the concept of co-creation between self and Creator. (p. 152) Indigenous understanding of self is explained in the context of process
and relationships with all that exists. The Creator seems to be the individual and the collective and at some times the difference between them becomes thin.

**Indigenous representation and APTN.**

The image of the Indian began with the initial historical colonial moment of contact. From this time onwards the conception of the image of the Indian downgraded the original inhabitants to the category of the ‘other,’ that is, the representative entity outside one’s own social group, class, culture or civilization. Broadly speaking, all non-Western cultures and civilizations are seen as the ‘other’ of the west. The most common representation of the ‘other’ is as the binary opposite of oneself, e.g. we are civilized, they are barbaric. From this ‘other’ position mainly three constructions of images or stereotypes evolved.

Retzlaff, Steffi, 2005

Quintero, G, (2001) explained that one of the purposes of colonization is to preserve “standardized categories and oppositional differences that distinguish the colonizers from the colonized” (p. 57), in order to oppress and control the colonized. In order to achieve this control, the colonizer attributes devaluated characteristics that create fixed ideas regarding race and culture. One way the Indigenous people have been oppressed has been through the visual misrepresentation of people and culture. Images of Indigenous people and their culture such as the image of the Mexican man sitting besides a cactus with a donkey, have been used to disseminate narratives that represent distorted identities and support racism, discrimination and oppression.

Images tell stories in a very powerful way and through them the colonial
story has been frozen in a time created by colonial perceptions, solidifying Indigenous people and their culture in stereotypes that help sustain “white lies” Steckley (2007). Through repetition of one story and omission of others, “truths” are constructed and believed. Recollet, N. (2001) explains that colonialism also includes the control of the stories of the people and through them white colonial hegemony has been preserved. Western religious stories of creation for example set aside Indigenous epistemologies and have transformed the way Indigenous people perceived the world and their lives. In this way, Medicine People were exposed as devil helpers and were forbidden to perform rituals and healings.

Hollywood and the film industry for decades depicted Native characters as primitive, exotic, aggressive and deceptive or as innocent, magical, or submissive. Over the last century, movies and more recently TV programs, have contributed to create and broadly distribute stereotypes such as the Romanticized Indian, the Indian Princess, the Native Warrior, the Noble Salvage, the Drunk Indian, the Lazy Indian, and the Spiritual Indian through omission, inaccuracies or simplistic characterizations. Today, many years after colonization and despite the actual awareness of cultural differences and Indigenous history, the misrepresentations continue unabated as can be seen in mainstream images that present white people as civilized and Indigenous people as uncivilized and exotic. Outside of APTN programs it is rare to see Indigenous role models on television

Pui-Yin Shiu, D. (2008) showed that this problem is sustained by the images or lack of images regarding Indigenous people and life that exists in Canadian high school textbooks. He writes: “In reviewing British Columbia’s currently recommended Social Studies textbooks, four main concerns continue
to exist and persist: Aboriginal peoples continue to be marginalized, essentialized, seen as a problem, and decontextualized” (p. ii).

According to Recollet, N. (2001) Canadian society still perceives Indigenous people as either violent, or as social, health, and welfare problems. She also argues that:

Applying the term 'Indian' also shows the ignorance and unwillingness of mainstream Canadian society to acknowledge First Nations as distinct groups of people whose cultures and identities are not frozen in time but rather dynamic as well as their efforts to offset the external imagery. The continuous use of the label 'Indian' shows how firmly entrenched the image of the 'Indian' is in the societal psyche.

(http://capstoneseminarseries.wordpress.com/back-issues/)

Although Indigenous misrepresentation is still prevalent in contemporary Canadian culture (Recollet, 2001), Indigenous people in Canada have been able to establish a network for self-representation through the network Aboriginals People Television Network “APTN”. This accomplishment was the result of many years of work and negotiating that finally shifted cultural representation practices.

The process was not an easy one, but opened a new venue for Indigenous self-representation. Despite the many problems, tensions and challenges that Aboriginal broadcasting has gone through, APTN is an example to be followed by other Indigenous groups around the world. APTN allows First Nations people today the opportunity to reach the homes of many people, who would have never had the opportunity to hear authentic Indigenous messages, know their lives or appreciate their culture. APTN allows Indigenous people to get together,
share their stories and “build bridges of understanding, to bridge cultural boarders’ (p. 267).

APTN and the use of other technological media, “has increased public awareness of the diversity of Indigenous life ways, raising concern for Indigenous issues and rights is one means to empower Indigenous communities on a scale never before possible” (Smith, C. and Ward, G, 2000, p. 3). Together with other expressive media such as film, video and the lately Internet, there is now a strengthening of First Nations people’s self-determination and self-representation, and a contributing to a process of Indigenous self-transformation of cultural understanding.
Ephemeral reflections disappear
Yet they are always there
Balancing life in between spaces
The Nation, and the foreign
**Identity: Social identification and Construction**

Identity is also related with self-identification. Through the theory of Social Identity (IT) Tajel (1978, 1979) and later Tajel and Turner (1979) explained how individuals express solidarity within their groups and discrimination against others as they embody their social identity, enhancing positive self-esteem and self-worth (Abram & Hogg, 1988 in Trepete, S., 2006). Tajfel (1979) also proposed that social identity is “part of an individual’s self-concept” (p. 63) and it is the result of knowing one’s affiliation to a social group. According to Ashfor B.E. and Mael, F. (1989):

a) Social identification is the perception of oneness with a group or persons; b) stems from the categorization of individuals, the distinctiveness and prestige of the group, the salience of outgroups, and the factors that traditionally are associated with group formation; and c) social identification leads to activities that are congruent with the identity, support for institutions that embody the identity, stereotypical perceptions of self and others, and outcomes that traditionally are associated with group formation, and it reinforces the antecedents of identification. (p.20)

Although some authors see Social Identity Theory (SIT) as being separate from Identity Theory, others like Burke, P & Stets, J. (2000) see “substantial similarities and overlap between social identity theory and identity theory” (p. 24). They explain that in both theories the self is reflexive and self-categorized or self-identified. In either case, both theories hypothesize that “people will seek opportunities to enact a highly salient identity” (p. 231), and when activated they
will act “to accomplish self-verification”. As I will show further this may have significant implications in the process of decolonization and in working with and for Indigenous populations. In my case, my self-identification has determined my behavior, and my culture has helped develop specific identities while degrading others and through social activism and social justice work some of these identities have been challenged and transformed. Throughout my doctoral program new identities emerged and were tested and developed within the context of this research.
Hybridism, two realities?
Better not cross?
Need to hold pain in the heart
but without collapsing.
Mestizo Identity

Although the process of self-identity development has been extensively discussed in psychology, racial identity development has not been studied as much. According to Tatum (1997) it has not received much attention since it does not affect white youth.

Racial identity has been studied from different points of view. As a biological dimension it is related with physical features (Spickard, 1989). This view allowed Europeans to mark difference over Indigenous people establishing the White supremacy. Also Hitler made use of this view to exterminate Jewish people, claiming a remarkable difference between the Arians and the rest of the races. Yet according to Littlefield, Lieberman, and Reynolds, (1982) there are more similarities than differences between racial groups.

Chávez, A. & Guido-DiBrito, F. (1999), explain that today the “manifestation of racial identities are discussed not in biological terms (which imply racism) but as a social construction” (p. 40). This social construction is based on personal perception of the others, not only based on skin color, but on subtle internal ideas of difference, such as clothing, house, cars, etc., which have “deep implications in how we are treated” (p. 40).

Social construction theory studies the complexities of the development of an identity within social groups and points out that not all people hold the same understanding of their belonging to a certain group. An interesting example of these complexities and differences of racial identification can be clearly seen when studying the Latino Mestizo identity.
When Christopher Columbus arrived in America in 1492, a process of interbreeding between Europeans and Indigenous people began. The resulting race was named half-breed or Mestizos, a name derived from the Spanish word *mesta* used by cattle breeders (Moore, J.H. 2008). As the number of Mestizos grew it took a place in the pyramid of castes in-between Whites and Indigenous and Black people.

*Mestizaje in Mexico.*

As a Mexican woman, I have experienced first hand the outcomes of mestizaje with its multiple contradictions and nuances. The Mestizo and Indigenous identity in Mexico have been used and reconstructed throughout the history of Mexico to solidify political issues. The conquest and colonization of Mexico did not only happen in the military and political arena, but created a new culture based on the mixture of two races. The use of the Indigenous symbols for political reasons have been used in Mexico since the XVII century and still continues today, yet Indigenous people in Mexico live in poverty and lack resources today. Mestizaje has been used in Mexico to overpower Indigenous people and force integration.

One of the most used mestizo symbols has been the *Virgen de Guadalupe.* The story tells that the Virgin Mother appeared in the “Cerro del Tepeyac” to the Indigenous man *Juan Diego.* She appeared as a brown woman with Indigenous features, and speaking the Indigenous language Nahuatl as a way of demonstrating to the Spaniard priests her care and love for Indigenous people. With this act a connection and acceptance of Indigenous people as equal to the Europeans was proclaimed and they were considered to have a soul as well.
Yet the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe has also been interpreted as a political religious movement, since the Aztecs honored their goddess “Tonantzin”, believed to be the manifestation of Mother Earth “Coatlicue”, in the same Cerro del Tepeyac. Because the pre-hispanic goddess temple had been destroyed by the conquerors the indigenous people’s cult was in decline. Yet those who still worshiped her were convinced that the apparition of the Virgen de Guadalupe was the same goddess and in this way the cult shifted from Aztec to Catholic was transferred, colonizing an indigenous story with a European version.

Since the apparition of the Guadalupana, her image has been used at crucial times in the history of Mexico (Branding, D. 1988). One of these important moments was the beginning of the war of Independence (1810), when the criollo priest Don Miguel Hidalgo called for war holding the Virgen of Guadalupe image as the flag. Although the icon was an Indigenous-mestizo image, the war for Independence did not benefit Indigenous people but rather gave power to the criollo group and the educated Mestizos. Today, the Virgen de Guadalupe image although no longer the national flag’s icon, it is still a very powerful symbol that can be seen all around Mexico, in public transit, taxis, restaurants, and shrines on sidewalks (Branding, D. 1988).

Regarding the development of Indigenous symbols related with politics, Benito Juarez, the first and only Indigenous president of Mexico has been used as Tokenism. He has been presented as an example and image of the possibilities that Indigenous have if -they focus on their studies-. Yet it never addresses why there has not been another Indigenous president in Mexico since Benito Juarez, nor the limitations that Indigenous children have to attend school today. The
story of his life, that of a poor Indigenous shepherd that through effort became
president, is told to every Mexican child in school. Children are instructed about
his battles with the church presenting a secular democratic country (Brandin, D.
1988). Students are also taught about his bravery fighting and executing
Maximiliano, the European emperor that conservatives had brought to rule
Mexico, bringing the government back to Mexican hands. Benito Juarez is quoted
often in political discourses of the different political parties and his face stands in
the 20 pesos bill.

Even though the use of Indigenous and Mestizo images had been part of
Mexican history, it was really after the Mexican civil war that the government
focused on developing the Indigenous/Mestizo identity to establish the bases of
a unified country. The Mexican Revolution was preceded by a surge of
nationalism. Intellectuals denounced the European doctrines and rebelled
against the 35-year dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, framing a new patriotism on the
Mestizo identity. To achieve this cause in 1922, Manuel Gamino, uncovered the
Teotihuacan pyramid, promoted the Indigenismo movement, and “reinstate
Anáhuac as the glorious foundation of Mexican history and culture, thus
reversing a century of Liberal scorn, looking to assimilate Indigenous people to
the “national society” (Brandin, D. 1988, p. 76). Gamino played a crucial role in
ethnographic, historical, linguistic, and geographic studies of the Indigenous
groups. He concluded that by “studying the country’s ethnic groups, ‘the Indian
problem’ could be solved” (Gonzáles, R. 2004, p. 143).

Under Vasconcelo’s supervision as minister of education between 1920
and 1930, hundreds of rural schools were created and used as the most powerful
tool to create the New Mexican identity and what he called the birth of La Raza
Cósmica. Artists such as Diego Rivera, David Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco "depicted the exploitation of Mexican campesinos and factory workers at the hands of elites and foreigners" (Gonzáles, R. 2004, p. 142). These murals were created in public spaces where they could educate (indoctrinate) the nationalistic view.

Although the aim of seemingly incorporating Indigenous people into these reforms was to help them participate in the Mexican life, the reality was the destruction of their communities. Francisco Navarrete (2005), in his paper El Mestizaje y las Culturas Regionales explains:

The Mexican Government model of the new “Ethnic citizenship” created profound cultural, social and ethnic changes in the country and created a new system of inter-ethnic relationships in Mexico. This process of change in the inter-ethnic relationships was parallel to the process of development of national identity consolidation of the Mexican state...This process was contradictory in some aspects, because although it modified some of the features of the hierarchy of the colonization, it accentuated others... the central element of this new inter-ethnic relationship system was the emergence of a new ethnic category, the one of the mestizos, that would become the majority of the population and even the embodiment of the new national identity. (n.d. my translation)

Having been born as part of the Mestizo majority, my life was influenced by the ideas of Vazconcelos and the multiple contradictions that being the race in between two opposing forces constitutes.
Multiple subjectivities

Rigid structures succumbing

Shedding layers of sorrow

Recapitulating past lives,

Rebirth in another land

A new consciousness
Critical Mestiza Identity.

Even though the term mestizaje has a deep historical and biological racial background, “the term has been used in chicano/a discourse to move beyond simple ideas of identity and identity politics” (Feghali, Z., 2011, p. xiii)

Mestizo identity “can situate knowledge in experiences and reflection on the often tense and ambiguous negotiations between interiorized private subjectivities and public, intersubjective spaces and relations” (Zuss, M. 1997). In the case of Latin America, the Mestizo identity and mestizaje have a deep relationship with power struggle.

According to Feghali, Z. (2011) “racial mixture in the Americas emerges from an unequal and highly textured history of violence and conquest and cheap, inhuman exploitation. This legacy continues to run throughout the weave of social and personal development in the Americas” (p xii).

The idea of racial mixture that mestizaje presents allows for “multiple subjectivities [and] it signals how the body is tied to a colonial history of racial hierarchy whose power relations already constrain and guide the body” (Feghali, 2011, p. 3). Juan Castro (2002) explains that mestizaje throughout history has served to celebrate “miscegenation or cultural mixture as a basis for conceiving a homogeneous national identity out of heterogeneous population” (in Perez 2006, p. 5).

In talking about mestizaje, the idea of multiple subjectivities emerges bringing the discussion of identity to a more complex understanding. “Critical mestizaje locates how people live their lives in and thorough their bodies as well as in and through ideology” (Feghali, Z. 2011, p. xiii). Beltran (2004) explains that in postmodern writings subjects are understood to be “embedded in the network
of power and history” (p. 595), and there is a difficulty in legitimately including minorities without “essentializing them” (p. 595).

Beltran (2004) further explains that Latin American people living in the USA have embraced an ambiguous fluid identity that identifies them with both the Spanish and the Indigenous roots. Within the context of Chicano critical discourses, mestizo/a identity has allowed chicanas/os, to take the position of the “conqueror and conquered” (p. 596), participating in a shared group that holds intimate links with colonial and Native American groups and with the European power.

One of these voices is Gloria Anzaldúa (1987). Through her writings, she has claimed that the racial position of the mestiza/o offers new possibilities for social and cultural transformation. Her use of pre-Hispanic images has become iconic in critical mestizaje theory. In 1987 she wrote “our greatest disappointments and painful experiences – if we can make meaning of them – can lead us toward becoming more of who we are, or they can remain meaningless. The Coatlicue state can be a way station or it can be a way of life” (p. 46).

For Gloria Anzaldúa mestizaje was not the embodiment of a fixed identity. It is the dynamics of living in-between worlds, constantly constructing and reconstructing identity, as a result of trespassing, transgressing and crossing all types of borders. For her being a mestiza is constantly being in a state of “mental nepantilismo, an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, la mestiza is a product of the transfer of cultural and spiritual values of one group to another” (p. 100). She furthers explains that by being in the land of the in-between the Mestiza
dismantle racial identification based on the idea of purity. Gloria called this action *Doing Mestizaje*.

Those of us who live skirting *otros mundos*, other groups, in this in-between state I call *nepantla* have a unique perspective. We notice the breaches in fem-inism, the rifts in *Raza* studies, the breaks in our disciplines, the splits in this country. These cracks show the flaws in our cultures, the faults in our pictures of reality. The perspective from the cracks gives us different ways of defining the self, of defining group identity (as cited in: Keating, 2005, p.1)

In the introduction to the second edition of *Borderlands*, Saldivar-Hull (1999) wrote: “Reclaiming and reinventing *Coatlicue, Malintzin*, and la *Llorona/Cihuaucoatl* in New Mestiza narratives, elaborates the constantly shifting identity formation of Anzaldúa’s Chicana/mestiza feminist” (p.7). Gloria Anzaldúa contests in her writings racial and gender hierarchies and power relations, seeking to “transform the self-hating that is one legacy of colonial encounters” (Pérez-Torres, 2006, p.24).

Although Vázquez’ (Mexican Minister of Education) cosmic race theory is responsible in a great way for overpowering Indigenous people through the idealization of the Mestizo identity, Anzaldúa’s work, and especially her book *La Frontera* (1987) were inspired by his work. To this respect Beltrán (2004) presents the following quote from Anzaldúa’s (1987) book *Borderlands*:

> Vasconcelos, Mexican philosopher, envisaged *una raza mestiza, una una mezcla de razas afines, una raza de color- la primera raza síntesis del globo.*

He called it a cosmic race, *raza cósmica*, a fifth race embracing the four major races of the world. Opposite to the pure Aryan, and to the policy of
racial purity that white America practices, his theory is one of inclusivity. At the confluence of two or more genetic streams, with chromosomes constantly “crossing over” this mixture of races, rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with rich genetic pool. From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an alien consciousness is presently in the making- a new mestiza consciousness, una conociencia de mujer. Is the consciousness of the Borderlands (p. 597, italics by the author).

This new conociencia de mujer or mestiza consciousness seems to be a need that Mestizos had to embrace in order to find a balance between the two opposing biologic and cultural heritages they live with. It is not a simple act, as it requires a long and painful inner struggle of self-examination, that she calls “taking inventory” (Anzaldúa 1987, p. 100), and resolving the psychic unsettledness that this action brings about. She expresses this clearly in her work Borderlands (1987) where she writes:

La mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of references cause un choque, a cultural collision. (p. 101)

Because the Mestiza is neither Indigenous nor White, and due to the fact that mestizaje was born with a stigma of impurity, half-breed, human-beast, reclaiming an identity within a more flexible understanding of race, and hoping
to reconcile two worldviews are very important. Anzaldúa (1987) explains it in this way:

These numerous possibilities leave la mestiza floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habits and patterns of behavior; these patterns and behaviors are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to sift out habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tend to use rationality to move forward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (p. 101)

An important point that Anzaldúa (1987) makes is the necessity of developing “tolerance to ambiguity” (p. 101), as the basis of any real inner transformation. She emphasizes the importance of moving away from dualistic thinking, learning to juggle cultures, break paradigms and operate within a pluralistic approach. She also stresses the need to break with all kinds of oppressive structures, reinterpret history and create new symbols to represent the change. She concludes that:

The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our language, our thoughts. A
massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war. (p. 102)

Anzaldúas’ work has influenced my work and life in a way that I never expected. Living outside my homeland, I have come to understand many of the struggles that arise when crossing borders and that she explains in a poetic and strong way. I believe this dissertation has been a work of a Nepantlera, being in no one's land... crossing borders and creating desmadres.
Trespassing
Transgressing
Challenging
In the in-between spaces
we need each other
**Ally Identity.**

One of the ways in which colonization has hurt Indigenous people has been through research and development of theories within a marked asymmetry of power and racism. Yet for the past decades and through the social justice work, a growing number of people belonging to the dominant social groups have looked to establish a different relationship, building a decolonizing relationship, based on solidarity and partnership, they are in search of a more egalitarian world, aiming to end the system of oppression that gave them the power. These non-Indigenous people who have recognized their privileged status and are looking for ways to ensure their work, narratives, and behaviors do not reproduce the dominant colonial relationship are known as Allies, a term coined by Bishop, A. in 1994.

I myself am one of those people interested in working with and not over people. Yet like many others who want to work for the benefit of others, without really understanding the Ally work, the systems of oppression and my underlying motivations, I had a high risk of creating more harm than helping.

Having been raised within a dominant group yet carrying Indigenous blood in myself placed me in a unique situation regarding the work of Allies, which I needed to further explore for the purpose of this research. To do so a literature review regarding social justice ally development, Ally work with Indigenous people, and Ally work within Indigenous groups was done to ensure that my relationship with Chepwapisk was an ethical and just one.

**Social Justice Ally Development Research.**

In her book, Becoming an Ally, Bishop (1994) laid out the basis of working
as an Ally in a framework that combines cognitive and behavioral components emphasizing six important points:

1) Understanding oppression; how it is created, maintained and recreated among individuals and within institutions, since "all oppressions are interdependent, they all come from the same worldview, and none can be solved in isolation" (Bishop, 2002, p. 20).

2) Familiarizing with and understanding the interactions among different oppressions and groups. “The vast majority of us ... are oppressor in some part of our identity, and oppressed in another. As long as separation, hierarchy, and competition are the underlying assumptions, this interweaving of power roles will keep the whole system in place” (p. 61).

3) Understanding one's own role in oppression, becoming “a worker in your own liberation” (p. 100).

4) Recognizing the oppression and taking action for change.

5) Educating others of the same dominant group about oppressive systems.

6) Maintaining hope and believing that habits of oppression can be unlearned.

Although Bishop's book, *Becoming an Ally* has been considered "primarily anecdotal, with little empirical support" (Reason, Millar & Scales, 2005, p. 530), her work not only contains an important presentation of the cognitive development of Allies regarding oppression, as well as the problematic of the Ally identity and their need of support. Bishop’s work is an inquiry on structures of oppression and a first hand experience of working as an Ally and of helping students reflect on their participation in structures of oppression.

Within the Ally research literature regarding empirical and theoretical work, there has been much attention to the exploration of factors leading or hindering people from the dominant group, to act as social Allies. Broido (2000) work was focused on the developmental process of social justice allyhood among
college students. Based on the definition of justice allies as members of dominant social groups, he found that students who have had precollege attitudes "about people different from themselves" (p. 21); had learned "new information about a variety of aspects of social justice... and facts and statistics about oppression and its continued existence and about the experiences of target groups members" (p. 21); were able to make meaning of "discussions, self-reflection, and perspective taking" (p. 22); had developed "confidence in themselves, their views and their knowledge" (p. 22); and had developed skills necessary to be an Ally, were more prone to engage in ally work.

Furthermore, Goodman (2000) identified the three main sources of Allies motivations that contributed to individuals supporting social justice. These are: "empathy, moral and spiritual values, and self-interest" (p. 1073). Further on, he expanded on the importance of self-interest in the development of motivation to help the other, and explained that self-interest underlines any Ally work and should be taken into consideration. Later on, O'Brien (2001) explored the role of race, social support networks, and empathy in the lives racial justice Allies. In addition, Stokes Brown (2002) presented the life histories of four White racial justice Allies, and Reason, Millar & Scales (2005), presented a model of Ally development among college students.

Helms's (1995) model of White racial identity has been used by different researchers on Allyhood to understand the process undertaken by members of a privilege groups to develop a sense of personal and social group identity, influencing their interest in working to end oppression. Helms model consists of four steps he called status which are: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudo-independence, immersion-emersion, and autonomy. This model explains
that in the contact status, the idea of assimilating oppressed groups to the dominant culture is present as a result of lack of awareness of the structures of oppression and the systems that sustains it. Later on when awareness of self-participation in oppression starts to develop disintegration status emerges accompanied with feelings of guilt, anger, and anxiety. Once these emotions are present the person responds to them and enters the status of reintegration in which aspiration for working as Ally is strengthen. Helms explain that sometimes when emotions are difficult to resolve, over intellectualization can happen giving place to a status called pseudo-independence. But when emotions are resolved, and a shift happens from trying to change the oppressed group, to looking to change the privileged the immersion-emersion status appears. Finally when the White identity is internalized, centered and balanced and a desire for self-liberation emerges the autonomy status is actualized, understanding the complexities and interdependence of all forms of oppression.

In 2006, Edward used Helms’s model to create an Ally developmental model, which goes from aspiring Allies self-interested to social justice Allies showing an altruistic behavior. His work conceptualizes various Allies identities helping understand “why some allies are effective, consistent, and sustainable where others are not” (p. 39). Edward’s model explains that during the early stage of Allies aspiring for Self Interest, motivation is mostly self-centered. His/hers interest is in helping those with whom there is already a connection. It is motivated by spiritual self-preservation, and has a sense of protective power. Allies in this stage do not recognize mistakes nor are interested in the system that creates privileges. They first look to rescue the oppressed or seek personal “spiritual salvation” (p. 48). In a second stage, Aspiring Ally for Altruism, the Ally
work selects a target group of victims to be empowered, feeling guilty about the system and aiming to be an exception. In this stage the Ally has difficulty admitting mistakes and struggles with critique or exploring personal issues. In this phase burnout and discouragement are also common. In the third and last stage, *Ally for Social Justice*, the Ally understands the connection between self and others and works for the benefit of the collective in a collaborative approach with the target group. His or her focus is on the system and finding ways to dismantle it, with a sustainable effort. It seeks critique and is working toward a personal liberation. Edward (2006) explains that only when Allies for social justice “recognize that the members of dominant groups are also harmed by the system of oppression” (p. 51), they can seek “not only to free the oppressed but also to liberate themselves and reconnect to their own full humanity” (p. 51). At this point Allies work is focus not on supporting individuals but rather in addressing social justice issues. Furthermore he states, “ending oppression may be grounded in spiritual or moral principles and an effort” (p. 52). Edward’s model is an important and useful tool for professionals seeking to develop social justice Allies qualities among university students and as a self-reflection tool for those who have self-identified as Allies.

Other studies based on the Social Identity Theory present a different model of Ally work. Lang (2011), for example explains that:

Individuals are bombarded with messages relating to their identities (girls/boys; rich/poor; white/black) from a very young age and the social behaviours that are acceptable with those identities. When we are young, we accept these identities as being part of who we are (they become normalized). It is not until we get older and more experienced in life that
we may begin to critically examine some of these identities, especially those that do not match our experiences. (Lang, 2010, p. 30)

This model also explains “how individuals ‘break out’ of the cycle of socialization, and involves analysis from the perspective of both dominant and target groups” (Lang, 2010, p. 30).

In relation to empirical studies of Ally development, Lang (2010) explains that they have mostly been focused on nurturing Ally behavior in college, and states that:

[they] were not concerned with the long-term commitments to social justice outside of the college experience [and] if we are serious about affecting personal, professional, and societal change, then we must look beyond the college or university experience and ask how are allies able to come together and stay together, outside of undergraduate school experiences, in practical workplaces and settings” (p. 32, italics by author).

It is also important to note that none of the studies considered the Ally development, work or relationships between Mestiza and an Indigenous person, which are both considered to be part of a marginalized group.

It is also important to stress that even though research regarding the development of Allies in university settings has been prolific, not all universities have made use of it, nor they have focused on the developmental of Allies. In my case for example, the only class in which the Ally work was discussed was Indigenous Epistemologies, yet mostly theoretical, with no training was provided for engaging in this kind of work.
**Ally work with Indigenous people.**

Since my work in this research was to collaborate with an Indigenous man, I became interested not only in learning about general Ally work, but also interested in exploring Ally work with Indigenous populations. One of the authors that delineates to a very fine degree the work of an Ally with an Indigenous population is Margaret (2010). Her work has also contributed in an important way to the understanding and performance of the Ally role.

Focusing on the definition of the term as well as in the qualities required for being an Ally Margaret (2010) also addresses the multiple challenges that working as Ally with Indigenous people brings about. In relation to that, Brophrey, (2011) establishes the context and commonalities in which indigenous and non-indigenous work takes place, making clear that many of these “are applicable across the diversity of ally relationships” (p. 7).

Regarding general qualities expected in an Ally worker with Indigenous people, Margaret (2010), includes: humility; ability to listen careful; sense of humor; patience; usefulness; knowing yourself; knowing and acknowledging whose land you are on; groundedness; endurance long-term commitment; flexibility, letting go of having the answers; being open to constant learning; courage; critical awareness; and self-awareness. She specifically demands Allies to “engage in specific and separate work amongst their own people, as well as supporting the struggles of those they are in alliance with” (p. 8), and develop a deep understanding of what is “the dominant-white/colonial mindset” (p. 8).

Regarding the path for the development of ally qualities she quotes Davis, L & Shpuniarsky, H (2010) who wrote:
We have learned that there is no simple recipe for respectful relationships, no 'best practices'. Relationship building is an on-going process that is fluid and unfolding. It requires commitment, attention, awareness and communication. There are ‘ups’ and ‘downs’ but through it all there are tremendous opportunities to work in solidarity and to make changes that will result in a more just world for present and future generations (as cited in Margaret, 2010, p. 8).

Margaret’s (2010) suggestions for Allies also include the teachings and wisdom of Indigenous worldviews. She states that by following the Ojibwe Seven Grandfather Teachings: honesty, humility, courage, wisdom, respect, generosity and love, it is possible to establish an Ally relationship.

Because working in cultures others than our own brings many challenges that have to be considered. To this regard, Margaret (2010) stresses the importance of “having appropriate cultural knowledge to engage respectfully while not appropriating” (p. 17) and to use as much as possible indigenous language, understanding that words have different meanings in different places and contexts. She also explains that “being an ally is clearly not about telling indigenous people what to do; however, taking a passive role does not create healthy relationships” (p. 16).

In the literature on Ally work with Indigenous people, as in any other Ally literature; developing trust is mentioned as crucial to working in a respectful and helpful way (Margaret 2010, Baskin 2006, Lang, 2010 and Brophey 2011). Reliability and maintaining long-term relationships also assure participants of the commitment they have established; presenting up front personal intentions; and following protocols are also noted as critical in an Ally relationship.
Allyson Brophey (2011), in her study of the experiences of six non-Indigenous researchers, who have sustained long-term research alliances with Indigenous people, mentions the importance of learning from other Allies in order to “move beyond the ‘recipe-style’ protocols and procedures” (p. 27) and be prepared to embrace a respectful long-term relationship in collaboration with Indigenous people. To achieve a quality relationship she brings about the importance of self-knowledge and states: “however we choose to identify ourselves, it seems clear that we need to be confident about this, be willing to share it and explain why we wish to engage in research with or for Indigenous people before we are in a position to respectfully and ethically do so” (p. 25). She also highlights the importance of an area in Ally work that, although mentioned in the literature, has not been fully explored, the “Ally self-care” (p. 105). She explains that Allies need to make plans to protect their spirits to work with Indigenous communities. Furthermore, Brophey recommends three approaches to be implemented by universities to prepare their students for ally relationships. These three approaches are:

1) Implementing enhanced preparation of non-Indigenous students researchers and faculty members who wish to engage in research with Indigenous people through coursework, mentorship, and accompaniment opportunities. 2) Providing a forum for researchers to engage in self-reflective activities as individuals, disciplines, and as researchers who are involved in working with Indigenous communities. 3) Encouraging, supporting and valuing the work of a researcher who writes about their experience as a non-Indigenous researcher working in Indigenous
contexts in addition to their writing about the content of the research. (p. 106)

Margaret (2010), points out several advantages of using the term Ally These are:

It is concrete- you can discuss how to act like an ally in particular circumstances. It allows for connection with the history of allies and how allies work. It provides a positive way of inviting people into the struggle. It can be a way to consider how to have ethical, accountable, transparent ways of working with Indigenous peoples / marginalized groups. It is used across a range of oppression and is useful for connecting between oppression. In Canada there is an ally tradition for First Nations people and indigenous metaphors making it good language to use. It makes you consider who you are in alliance with (p. 11).

Margaret (2010) also mentioned some important limitations of the use of the term. Two important ones are ”the concept can become meaningless if its use is not aligned with action [and] you are only an ally for as long as you keep acting as an ally. [In both cases] the term has ‘them’ and ‘us’ connotations [and therefore] it is based on a Western Christianity model of individualism and interpersonal rather than organizational relationships” (p. 11).

Lang (2010), looked at the concept of Ally, both from the perspective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, showing a more fluid identity and “broadening its scope beyond the white experience” (p. 7), and bringing anti-racism theory in the forefront of Aboriginal education. In her study Being Allies: Exploring Indigeneity and Difference in Decolonized Anti-oppressive Spaces, Lang explains that:
Through the experience of working with/being allies with Indigenous members and each other, group members experienced Other ways of knowing and learning beyond a mind-centric epistemology—that is, a cognitively focused perspective on knowledge creation—to consider how an embodied notion on racial ally learning essentially merges the epistemological with the ontological. Such a conception of collaborative ally learning illustrates the synergy that emerges amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, and how new understandings beyond the binary relationship of Indigenous/non-Indigenous develop. (p. 7-8)

Regarding the importance of incorporating Spirituality in social work and Ally development, Cynthia Baskin (2002) has been a strong advocate of using Spirituality to resist oppression. In her study Circles of Resistance: Spirituality in Social Work Practice, Education and Transformative Change, Baskin states:

In teaching a course on becoming an ally to First Nations people, I bring our spirituality into the classroom not only by speaking about it, but also by doing it. This is accomplished through the use of space, guest speakers, sacred objects, offsite visits and experiential learning...although structural social work includes this historical perspective in its analysis of oppression; it lacks any discussion of culture, values and spirituality. This is problematic from an Aboriginal perspective as it omits the significance of a spiritual foundation. Hence, with regards to spirituality, structural social work is no different from conventional social work. This is where I challenge it because it does not allow for this important
aspect that is so significant to Aboriginal communities and other Indigenous peoples worldwide. While structural social work is anti-oppressive and focuses on social change, which is vital for working with Aboriginal communities, it does not incorporate spirituality in any way and, therefore, is not a holistic approach. (p. 5-6)

Further more she comments that Spirituality can bring social responsibility and can help resist oppression. She finally reminds us that many Aboriginals have resisted colonization through Spirituality such as the great Spiritual leaders “Crazy Horse, Louis Riel and Leonard Peltier” (p.6).

**Preparation and Self Care in Ally Work**

Ally literature has repeatedly outlined skills, values, and attitudes desired from an Ally, (Bishop 1994, Edward, 2006, Margaret, 2010). Brophey (2011) study about the preparation and methods used for doing research with Indigenous people and sustaining a long time alliance, identified that beside personal life experiences such as travelling and/or leaving abroad, no preparation had taken place prior to engagement in Ally work. She found that besides “orientation towards respecting different ways of being in the world and a desire to understand and support people to follow their own path” (p. 90-91), withholding judgment and being flexible were considered to be main qualities needed to have a successful long standing Ally relationship. Therefore Brophey (2011) suggests that in order to perform research without hurting Indigenous people, Allies should adequately prepare for this important role and methods needs to be developed that can support Allies in learning how to work together
with Indigenous people and communities. She concludes that:

Given the history of Indigenous research, preparing to do this good work in Indigenous contexts is an important part of the research process, especially for non-Indigenous researchers. It is important that researchers realize this and make preparing themselves a priority. (p. 1)

Although it is clear that specific qualities are required to engage in an Ally relationship and that it is necessary to prepare for this kind of work, literature review did not offer specific methods for this. Regarding emotional stress and self-care in Ally work, Bishop (1994) recognized that being an Ally is difficult and hope and idealism need to be foster in order to support alliances. She states “becoming an ally is a liberating experience, but very different from liberating your own people and, in some ways, more painful” (Bishop, 2000, http://www.becominganally.ca/Becoming_an_Ally/Becoming_an_Ally__Ch_1.html).

Concurring with Bishop (1994), Edward (2006) states that as awareness of self-privilege develops “guilt becomes a primary underlying, often unconscious motivator” (p. 49), and anger and despair are commonly present. He explains that moving from an intellectual understanding of oppression to an emotional connection is useful but emotions cannot be a sole motivator, because it can lead to adopt a hero or rescuer role. It can also lead to adopting a paternalistic approach and develop burnout. Furthermore it can leave aspiring Allies “vulnerable to many obstacles and often limits them to simply responding to, rather than actively addressing, the systemic roots of oppression. Edwards
states Allies need to develop the capacity for self-reflection in “new and liberating ways” (p. 51).

Aware of the importance of self-care, Brophey’s (2011) expressed:

Researching in Indigenous contexts can be challenging work on an emotional level so it is important to consider ways to take care of oneself as a researcher. Participants spoke about the ways that they take care themselves and in some cases their colleagues and participants in the research project as well. (p. 97)

Although Brophey (2011) explained that non-Indigenous researchers have done “brushing-offs and other kinds of ceremonies” for self-care, and that non-Indigenous researchers have instructed their students to consider self-care when working with Indigenous populations, there is a gap in the literature regarding specific methods for Ally self-care which need to be addressed.
Floating, forming, deconstructing
The Mestiza prepares the beads for the necklace
Turquoise, jade, amber, and onyx
Its time to cross again
Do Ceremony
Greet and honor the Void
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Background

Throughout the six years I have been working with and for Indigenous people in Canada I have come to understand that alliances are fraught with attitudes that people bring from their culture, race, spiritual beliefs and worldviews. My journey as an Ally has brought me many satisfactions and also disappointments and emotional disturbances. Constantly I ask myself if my behavior was adequate and if I am addressing my personal agenda or supporting the other in her or his needs and desires. I have acted as a collaborator, teacher, and friend, which could be encompassed in the concept of Ally, as discussed in the colonization/decolonization literature: however the “Ally” concept does not encompass the multiple tensions and complexities that arise when negotiating differences in a relationship.

This study began not only out of my curiosity about Indigenous Spirituality, Indigenous ways of knowing, -because I too am Indigenous - and the Ally identity, but also due to the tensions and challenges that I encountered working with and for Indigenous people in Canada. Although at the beginning of my research my intention was solely to collaborate with Chepwapisk, very soon I realized the focus of this research had to be focused on myself as an Ally. My research interest became to have an in depth exploration of what it is to be an Ally, which included feelings, emotions, and the self-dialogue (Ellis, 2004) that accompanies this experience. Therefore my research questions are: 1) How does a Mestiza experience Allyhood? 2) How can the embracement of the concept of selflessness influence Ally work? 3) What benefits can mindfulness practices;
divination; prayers; dreams; and art-based reflections bring to Ally work? 4) What new learning and understandings can an alliance of a Mestiza and a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher bring to colonizing/decolonizing and Ally theory?

With these questions in mind I established a cooperative working relationship with Chepwisk, a Plains Cree Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher who needed assistance in establishing a website. This relationship offered me a singular opportunity to deeply explore what is means to be an Ally. This study will contribute to the scholarly literature of colonization/decolonization and may be of interest to others who are “outsiders” who wish to work in relation to Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples
Crossing time

Crossing Stories

Intertwined, complex

Author and character

Imposed, Adopted

Contested
Autoethnography

The research methodology selected for this study is autoethnography. The objective was to explore and deepen my understanding of being an Ally, in the natural setting in which my experience took place. As a qualitative approach, autoethnography is concerned with the process rather than the product and focuses on the meaning I made of my life and experience as an Ally (Creswell, 2009). The main goal was to better understand human behavior and experiences, which in this particular case referred to those of being an Ally.

The purpose of autoethnography is to provide new understandings into the area of concern from a first hand point of view. Based on Ellis & Bochner (2000) autoethnography was selected as the most suitable methodological approach for this dissertation. The authors state that:

The autobiographical genre of writing and research displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations (p. 739).

Autoethnography is a self-reflexive work, which allows one to connect with the social world (Reed-Danahay, 1997) in a first person voice. It is a research that links the personal to the culture and the social (Ellis, 2004).

According to Stinson, A. (2009) this methodology “stands in the intersection of three genres of writing: (a) native anthropology, (b) ethnic autobiography, and (c) autobiographical ethnography (p. 34). Denzin and
Lincoln (2005) consider autoethnography a research that connects multiple layers of consciousness. Autoethnography traces its roots to social constructivism: recognition that knowledge is contextual, or situated, in the interplay of culture and individual.

My autoethnography is a personal account of the complicated and conflicted situation of working as an Ally, being both Mestiza and Buddhist in a culture of colonization/decolonization. This self-exploration presents my confusions and frustrations that accompanied my work, uncovering and sharing with the reader my vulnerable self. However, the knowledge derived from this type of exploration may have implications for others who undertake Ally work. Unique to this exploration are modalities I chose to help with a deeper understanding, and as possible approaches to prepare for Allyhood and to address emotional stress and prevent burnout in Allyhood. These modalities were: self-art exploration, meditation, mindfulness practice, prayer, dream work, and narratives and poetry.

Through my autoethnographic work I invite the reader into my experience, to look for similarities and differences with their own personal experience and life story. In this way we can both explore what constitutes an Ally identity and work (Chang 2008), and the reader can possibly undergo a transformative insight, as I did through my work.

**Indigenous paradigms and autoethnography**

Indigenous paradigms “require the holistic use and transmission of information” (Wilson, 2008, p. 32). Looking to use a culturally appropriate way to share my experience (Denzin & Lincon, 2005), autoethnography allowed
repositioning myself as storyteller in alignment with Decolonizing methodologies and Indigenous paradigms.

According to Connelly and Clandinin, (1990), stories are “the way humans experience the world... people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives” (p.2). Archivald (2008) presents how and why storytelling is important for Indigenous people. Through her work she shows how storytelling can be used in education as an analytical and theoretical tool. Within the qualitative research, autoethnography can be understood as a way of storytelling. It allows researchers to describe their lives, collect and tell their stories and write narratives of experience. In this research, I became the object of my research, and the text repositioned the reader as co-participant in dialogue (Ellis, 2000), seeking to activate her/his emotional response (Stinson, A, 2009).

Autoethnographers make use of stories and analyze “narrative materials” (Moen, T. 2006, p. 2). Autoethnography differs with any other formal inquiry in the importance it gives to personal experiences and interpretations, and it is the embodiment of lived experience (Clandinin & Connelly 2000).

Using stories in Indigenous research assures Indigenous voices and epistemologies to be heard. Lekoko, L. (2007) states: “to remove stories from empirically accepted research tools is to silence indigenous communities by depriving them of using a mode consistent with their culture and their ways of understanding the world they live in” (p. 82). Furthermore Smith, L. (1999) writes:

Story telling, oral histories, the perspective of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about stories is not that they simply tell a story, or
tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place...for many indigenous writers stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and pass the story down further. The story and the storyteller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with other, the land with the people with the story” (p. 144. 145)

The practice of storytelling rests in the ethics of Indigenous relational accountability, honoring lived experience, and connection to the land (Wilson, 2008). Storytelling can also constitute a way of crossing borders, and explore the stories that live in between spaces; liminal states; in the amorphous and intangible. In my stories where layers of Indigenous and non-Indigenous, spiritual ad scientist are all layered and simultaneous, autoethnography offered a place for complexity to emerge in a research context.
In the Medicine Pouch

The Mestiza carries precious amulets
Claiming, Storytelling, Revitalizing, Connecting,
Representing, Envisioning, Reframing, Creating
Reflecting Self,
Life Reflections.
Research Paradigm

This research is located within decolonizing theory. It seeks to ameliorate the effects that colonization has inflicted on Indigenous people, and to contribute to dismantling the structures of oppression (Smith, 1999). It also looks to honor Indigenous epistemologies by engaging in research as ceremony and ceremony as research (Wilson, 2008).

Situating this study within decolonizing methodologies involves the development of a critical consciousness for social-cultural change (Freire, 1972), when facing the dominant culture’s assumption, that “Western ideas about most fundamental things are the only possible to hold, certainly the only rational ideas, and the only ideas which can make sense of the world, of reality, of social life and of human beings” (Smith, 1999, p. 56).

Regarding Indigenous paradigms and decolonizing methodologies, diverse authors have stated important differences between Indigenous and Western research paradigms. Steinhauer, E. (2002, cited in Wilson 2008) explains, an Indigenous paradigm considers knowledge as relational, since it is shared with the whole cosmos. Therefore, researchers in this paradigm have to be accountable to all of their relations. Supporting this, Wilson (2008) wrote: “If Indigenous ways of knowing have to be narrowed through one particular lens (which I certainly does not), then surely that would be relational. All things are related and therefore relevant” (p. 58).

Wilson, (2008) cites Judy Atkison’s guidelines for doing Indigenous research. These are:

• Aboriginal people themselves approve the research and the
research methods.

- A knowledge and consideration of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to community;
- Ways of relating and acting within community with and understanding of the principles of reciprocity and responsibility;
- Research participants must feel safe and be safe, including respecting issues of confidentiality;
- A non-intrusive observation, or quiet aware watching;
- A deep listening and hearing with more than ears;
- A reflective non-judgmental consideration of what is being seen and heard;
- Having learnt from the listening a purposeful plan to act with actions informed by learning, wisdom, and acquired knowledge;
- Responsibility to act with fidelity in relationship to what has been heard, observed, and learnt;
- An awareness and connection between logic of mind and the feeling of the heart;
- Listening and observing the self as well as the relationship to others;
- Acknowledgement that the researcher brings to the research his or her subjective self. (p. 59)

Wilson (2008) also includes within the Indigenous research paradigm, the need for researchers to exercise: respect of life, kindness, honesty, compassion benefiting the community, expecting change and transformation, integrity, and accepting Elder's advice and/or knowledge. In addition to this, Absolon and
Willet (2004) claim respectful representation; revising; reclaiming; renaming; remembering; reconnecting; recovering; and researching, as aspects that delineates a decolonizing work.

Smith (1999) further suggests basing decolonizing work in the 25 decolonizing projects which are: claiming, testimonies, story telling, celebrating survival, Indigenizing, inventing, revitalizing, connecting, reading, writing, representing, gendering, envisioning, reframing, restoring, returning, democratizing, naming, protecting, creating, negotiating, discovering, and sharing. She states that because the imperial mind has been imposed through the way in which knowledge has been collected, classified and represented, decolonizing researchers need to focus on developing a research agenda that “connects local, regional and global efforts which are moving towards the ideal of a self-determining Indigenous world” (p. 114). Further more, she states that these projects must be done in accordance with ethical protocols where Indigenous communities and rights are recognized. These projects must also align with traditional ceremonies and protocols in order to contribute to the process of decolonization. They are geared toward a process of transformation, healing and mobilization of people (Smith, 1999).

For the purpose of this dissertation twelve of the twenty-five decolonizing projects suggested by Smith (1999) were observed to ground my work within a decolonizing frame. The projects addressed were: claiming, story telling, celebrating survival, testimonies, Indigenizing, revitalizing, connecting, representing, envisioning, reframing, democratizing, and creating.

Even though it is said that decolonization approaches need to respond to community based work, emerging from a process of community consultation,
collective meetings, open debate and shared decision, because communities of shared interest do not necessarily occupy the same geographical space, this is not always possible. Within the context of this research I paid special attention to the fact that Chepwapisk self-defines as a Plains Cree urban Indian, and his ways and traditions do not correspond to all Plains Cree Indigenous people. He occupies a different geographical space from his community. Living in the city and not in his community, his understandings can be different from those who live in reserves.

Decolonizing methodologies promotes the expression of self-defined communities - distinct by political, social, psychological, historical, linguistic, economic, cultural and spiritual spaces. This contributes to contest the Pan-Indian idea that has been encouraged by colonialism and the icons that contemporary media expose as Indigenous.

Although Decolonization Methodologies and Indigenous paradigms have mainly been used by Indigenous researchers and people interested in social justice, colonization involves all people, thus decolonization is not merely a problem that interests Indigenous people, but rather one that affects all human kind.

Baskin (2005) comments:

Everyone is affected by the impacts of colonization in Canada, including the descendants of the settler population and those who immigrate here. White people are affected because they have been robbed of the opportunity to have what could have been an environment that was inclusive of Aboriginal values and worldviews, which have much to offer all humanity. Racialized people - both those who are born in Canada and
those who immigrate here- are affected not only because the latter are fleeing colonized places, but also because the way in which they are all treated here by the dominant population are similar in many respects to those first practiced on Aboriginal peoples. (p. 160)

As a mestiza woman I also understand that my existence abuse, conquest, trauma. Yet, it also placed me in between both of my ancestors worldviews, where multiple tensions has made it difficult for me to define a racial identity, and has provided me with an emotional burden to carry, that includes guilt and shame and often rejection from both groups: Indigenous and White.

Based on my personal experience of being a Mestiza, the process of decolonization should not focus solely on reinforcing Indigenous people’s voice, but also in creating bridges of understanding that transcend race. In addition it should look for ways of negotiating differences and finding commonalities that can allow all people live in more harmonious relations with each other and with nature.
Offering before asking

Life is Ceremony

Doing Mestizaje

Crossing from the profane to the sacred
Protocols and Ceremonies

Working within decolonizing methodologies includes the understanding and honoring of traditional protocols based on spiritual beliefs and cultural values, many of which were questioned, and/or banned by the Western colonizing mind. Onowa McIvor (2010) said:

In order to be a good person, I must be spiritually strong. In order to be spiritually strong, I must partake in ceremonies and rituals to stay connected with the ancestors. In preparation for research work in communities, I smudge and pray several times a day for weeks before. If I am staying in the community, I also smudge and pray (privately) while in the community before I meet with those who have agreed to be part of the research. When I come home to "analyze" and write, I smudge and pray daily throughout the time asking for guidance, strength, and blessings. (p. 140)

Offerings and Reciprocity.

Among First Nations in Canada, offering constitutes an important protocol. In my country, Mexico, we honor this protocol with multiple festivities that allow us to share with each other. One of them is the Guelaguetza in Oaxaca, which I have attended many times.

Typically Mexican people are warming and like to share. In my family I was also taught to offer before expecting to receive, and the act of reciprocity became part of my being. Although I am not sure what the epistemological base was for my parents to teach me reciprocity, from an Indigenous point of view it is based on the understanding of interdependence and it ensures a balanced and
reciprocal relationship with all. It acknowledges the need to live in balance and harmony, taking and giving in equal ways. These protocols of reciprocity also note the importance of giving before receiving as an act of humbleness, and respect, and the demonstration of power by giving and not by accumulating. But most important of all it ensures proper offering to the Spirits contained in everything before taking from them.

Another way of showing reciprocity is the offering of food, music, and hospitality. In many towns in Mexico the idea that power and greatness is shown through sharing is still alive, and there are long waiting lists for people wanting to sponsor the town festivities which includes not only giving food and liquor, but also taking care of music, fireworks and adornments exists. To be el *Mayordomo de la Fiesta* is considered a lifetime desire, and privilege.

A different way of enacting this protocol is the offering of food to the death, during the Day of the Dead festivity. In this ritual a shrine with the food that the deceased liked when alive is prepared for him or her to enjoy in spirit. Candle lighting is also an important aspect of this ceremony. It constitutes the way of guiding the Spirit back and forth to the “other world”.

Candle lighting in general is a very common offering in Mexico, although its historical background might be the result of the blending of Christian rituals with Indigenous ceremonies. Candles of all colors can be found in the *mercados* and *Santería* stores. Some come with aromas, and mix in coins, herbs, and amulets to please the deity, saint or spirit to which is offered to. Other candles have a prayers to be said out loud when lighting them. Also candles are used based on their color, size and shape to address specific rituals.

Another important protocol that entitles giving before asking among
Indigenous people in Mexico and First Nations in the USA and Canada is offering of tobacco. Before asking for or taking anything, tobacco is offered to people, places, and spirits, as it is considered a sacred medicine. Michell, H. (1999) explained that Indigenous teachings “reveal the cultural significance of tobacco as a spiritual and sacred entity that helps us to remember the importance of our reciprocal and interdependent relationship in the web of creation” (cited in Baskin, 2005, p. 3). Tobacco offering is part of ceremonies, sealing agreement, and needs to be observed by researchers when asking about stories, songs or collecting material from Indigenous people or communities. Through the offering of tobacco, reciprocal and respectful relationships are established, while acknowledging cultural sensitivity. It also legitimates and recognizes consent from participants before starting the research or collaborative work.

Offering has been part of my life and is an important aspect of the Mexican culture. Our hospitality is well known by the many tourists that visit Mexico every year and our dances and folklore are a constant reminder of the importance of offering and sharing.

Growing up in Mexico I experienced and learned the importance of offering on a daily basis. My grandmother taught me the beauty of letting go of material things to offer them to others. I also learned the importance of offering as part of my folklore dance training. As a conchero dancer for example, I learned the importance of offering copal to the four directions; dancing the Xochipitzahuatl dance, I carried and offered flowers; and observing the Danza de los Voladores de Papantla, I admired the offering of flowers, alcohol and tobacco to the four cardinal points prior to flying down the spiral.

Although I cannot be sure that offering is an important aspect of all
Indigenous groups, I believe it could be, as I think the connection that Indigenous people have or had to mother earth is very profound as well as the understanding of interdependence. Through my travelling to Bolivia, Peru, and Tibetan exile camps in India, for example I was able to observe the importance that offering carried in those cultures. In Bolivia people offer alcohol and food to *La Pacha Mama* (mother earth) when travelling through the high peaks. In Peru, the Shaman smokes tobacco prior to performing a ceremony and Tibetan people offer butter lamps, food and delicate sculptures called *Tormas* to the deities.

As a Buddhist practitioner myself I have been taught the importance of offering light, food, water, flowers, and incense on a daily basis to all beings. On a daily basis and with the intention of bringing to mind the truth of interdependence with the cosmos, I do offerings. I also light a candle as a symbol of my true nature and the true nature of my Spiritual Teachers and to honor them.

Understanding that Chepwapisk is a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher, and aware of the importance that offering has in both our cultures and spiritual practices. I observed the protocol of offering tobacco to him prior to engaging in collaboration. Another important protocol that was observed in this research is the one mentioned by, Baskin (2005) which refers to taking care of participants. Baskin (2005) explains that researchers working with Indigenous people need to know they are expected to provide food, drinks and gifts. She comments that not observing these protocols presents the researcher as disrespectful and not understanding the importance of the knowledge that is being offered by part of the Indigenous person in the research.
Water, Air, Earth, Warmth

A cycle

Supporting each other

Allowing others to live and grow

Friendship

Alliances
Working in Alliance - Cooperative Inquiry

Within the frame of decolonizing methodologies, Cooperative Inquiry offers “primarily a way of doing research with persons rather than on persons” (Heron, 1985, p. 28). By drawing on experiential knowing (Heron, 1996; Lang, 2010), cooperative inquiry is an important method to develop Allyhood. Having emerged from the practices of Participatory Action Research (PAR), it is a unique method that promotes “democracy, empowerment, and knowledge” (Kindon, S., Pain, R., and Kesby, M., 2008, p. 90), allowing participants to produce knowledge and actions that can benefit them directly.

The four-phase reflection cycle described by Heron (2007) would offer me the opportunity of fostering a co-creative work, while honoring individual subjective experiences. As an Ally it would give me the possibility of working with the Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher without distorting or misrepresenting his work. The reflection stages, analogous to sense making of the data, and the action stages analogous to data collection, would assure proper respect for him, his teachings, and his culture. This approach would also give me the space to explore my personal cultural roots as it gives “primacy to transformative inquiries that involve action, where people change their way of being and doing and relating in their world” (Peden, 2004, in Lang 2010, p. 10).

The type of co-operative inquiry that I anticipated taking place was the one called “open boundaries” which “elicit data and feedback from people with whom the inquiries interact in the action phases, but are not themselves part of the research” (Penden 2004 in Lang 2010, p. 24). This type of work was chosen anticipating the need to consult experts in the construction and marketing of the
website on one hand and the suggestions, guidance and inputs from my committee members.

According to Treleaven, 1994 (cited in Lang, 2010), “with external participation, it is possible to avoid several of the implicit dangers of collaborative inquiry. Participants are not assumed to fully resource their own inquiry but are able to draw on knowledge beyond the group. External voices can also present a challenge to the paradigms within which the inquiry/co-researchers are located” (p. 24). Furthermore, interested in working on my personal decolonization, co-operative inquiry could also offer an excellent way to address my own personal liberation while working to fully honor Chepwapisk work and teachings.

Following cooperative inquiry guidelines, this research was done in four phases. In phase one: Chepwapisk and I explored and agreed on the area to be researched; developed a set of points to achieve in the work, such as the kind of virtual space to be constructed; explored the content that other spiritual sites and teaching to be offered; and agreed in the way we would gather data and record information. In phase two: we became fully engaged in the research experience; surveyed spiritual and Indigenous web sites; and constructed his web site. On phase three we focus on individual processes and outcomes; we reflected on our own personal process. In phase four: we came together to evaluate our original propositions and addressed questions resulting from the research experience. We reflected about how the experience has lead us away from established ideas and outcomes.

Through cooperative inquiry I constantly repositioned myself from being a researcher to being a collaborator, so I would “no longer need to seek to give
voice to others, to empower others, to emancipate others, to refer to others as subjugated voice, but rather to listen to and participate with those traditionally ‘othered’ as constructors of meaning of their own experience and agents of knowledge” (Bishop, 1998, 2070 in Baskin, C., 2005, p. 89).
When crossing
Discipline and perseverance
Mindfulness, Flexibility, Curiosity
Gentleness and knowing limits
and
Very important to be guided by
an experienced, compassionate and wise guide
Decolonizing Myself: Doing Mestizaje.

Doing mestizaje implies accepting and critically exploring self-identity understanding that Mestizas have “the power to explain [the] meaning of [their] lives lived in the racial and social margins” (Perez-Torres 2006, p. 195), and the struggles that accompany the need to find a sense of home or belonging within a culture or a community. It recognizes that narratives of Mestizas like me can bring insight about how we have experienced the world, and our stories “assert that some special knowledge is born among those disposed by history, those discriminated against and excluded from power, those taught to hate themselves for their very physical presence” (Perez-Torres, 2006, p.197).

Anzaldúa said that this new consciencia de mujer or Mestiza consciousness is not accomplished through a single act, but rather by a long and painful inner struggle of self-examination, that she calls “taking inventory” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 100), and resolving the psychic unsettledness that this action brings about. She expresses this clearly in her work Borderlands (1987) where she writes:

*La mestiza* undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages. The coming together of two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of references cause un choque, a cultural collision ... these numerous possibilities leave *la mestiza* floundering in uncharted seas. In perceiving conflicting information and points of view, she is subjected to a swamping of her psychological borders. She has discovered that she can’t hold concepts or ideas in rigid
boundaries. The borders and walls that are supposed to keep the undesirable ideas out are entrenched habit and patterns of behavior; these patterns and behaviors are the enemy within. Rigidity means death. Only by remaining flexible is she able to stretch the psyche horizontally and vertically. La mestiza constantly has to shift out habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move forward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (p.101)

Being a Mexican Mestiza woman, and based on the literature review of being an Ally that explains that one of the requisites of an Ally is to do a self-reflection about the personal cultural roots, similar to what Anzaldúa called "taking inventory" (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 100), I realized that similar to her my work in this dissertation included Doing Mestizaje. Therefore, inspired by Anzaldúa’s strength and courage crossing borders, entering prohibited territories, and transgressing dominant cultural ways of thinking, I began to Do Mestizaje hoping to explore and understand the psychological, and cultural effect of having been raised as a White being in true a Mestiza.

Moving from one border to the other and embracing my own mestizaje could propell me to find spaces of reconciliation between White and Indigenous, and it would emphasize commonalities that we all share as human beings. Doing Mestizaje could give me the tools and strategizes to work in the process of decolonization in terms of respect, compassion and love. Furthermore it would
show ways in which we could all learn from each other and help fellow humans in this path we call life.

Doing Mestizaje would offer not only a place for my inner voice to share private stories, but would allow the presentation of multiple borders that Chepwapisk and I crossed to be who we are now. By Doing Mestizaje I believed my work as an Ally would be benefited and the self-reflections of exploring my cultural roots would help me participate in the collaborative relationship.
Walking ancestral pathways,
Tracking my footsteps
Collecting bark and feathers
To weave the stars in the cosmos
With a prayer
Data Collection

In autoethnography the researcher and researched are the same, therefore data comes from the researcher’s personal experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). In this research my personal experience constituted the data. This was gathered through a variety of modalities, which allowed me to address questions as they surfaced along the experiences. These modalities were: journaling, divination, meditation, mindfulness practice, dream work, and art-based exploration. Each one of them offered a unique way to uncover layers of understanding and meaning, which I could not have accessed in any other way. Furthermore, this modalities were explored as possible approaches to prepare people for Ally work as well as possible approaches to address emotional stress and prevent burnout resulting from being an Ally.

Journaling

Journaling was selected to help me keep track of the experience of being an Ally on a regular basis, often combined with observations and insights resulting from an informal mindfulness practice and dream work. Through this approach I was able to captured my present experiences and reflect on past memories and perspectives.

Divination.

Indigenous people have used multiple ways of divination as a way of contacting what reason cannot grasp, and to walk the intricate paths of the unconscious (Jung, 1995, in Von Franz, Herderson, Jacobi, & Jaffé, eds, 1964).

According to Angela Voss, director of the MA program in Divination at the Cosmology and Divination project (http://www.cosmology-divination.com/index.php/divination-studies), divination is an ancient practice
that involves the interaction with multiple, different and hidden forms of intelligence, which have been negated by the dominant rational-analytic scientific model. Yet it is important nowadays to understand the contribution that divinatory practices can play in the fields of consciousness and transpersonal psychology. Voss states that:

Divinatory practices arise from a multi-dimensional worldview, involving human interaction with 'hidden' forms of intelligence which may be given various epithets, such as 'god', 'spirit-like', or 'divine', in all cases implying a) an authoritative or illuminating spiritual or psychic relationship with respect to the practitioner, and b) an underlying cosmological frame of reference ... This is a human activity of extraordinary scope and vitality and a singular and highly distinctive phenomenology, identifiable across cultures and historical epochs, and of great significance in its contemporary cultural manifestations, own philosophical and metaphysical discourses. Methods of study need to be found which may begin to heal the split between theoretical and participative knowledge, and this would also have wider implications for the fields of ecological concern and the 'science-religion' debate. In this sense, divinatory studies would contribute to the inter-disciplinary fields of consciousness and transpersonal psychology, new-age religion and complementary medicine. (http://www.cosmology-divination.com/index.php/divination-studies)

Divination "involves the study of symbolic perception and interpretation, through considering the role of the visionary imagination in facilitating the mode of insight termed 'divinatory'" (http://www.cosmology-
divination.com/index.php/divination-studies), and notes the relationship that exists between divination and the arts, in relation to the metaphorical interpretation of symbols and the use of complex symbolic systems like the ones present in card readings or the consultation of texts like the I Ching.

Within a phenomenological approach based on Deleuze’ method of transcendental empirism, Semetsky (2004) states images of Tarot cards or other divination systems provide a “practical means for determining the meaning and content of mental representations thus addressing (albeit not solving) one of the problems of primary significance in contemporary cognitive science” (p. 1). She explains “experience can’t be reduce to what is immediately perceived: the line of flight or becoming is real even if we don’t see it, because is the least perceptible of things” (p. 2). Furthermore, she states that, because divination is a process in which the Deluzian object is yet not been formed as a thought, and exists only as a tendency, it can be actualized through multiple “different/ciations” (p. 2).

In addition and based on semiotics, Semetsky (2004), explains Tarot and other divination systems that use cards or images as:

A mode of graphic communication capable of transmitting information by means of a visual channel. The graphic information may be expressed in a form of diagram, network and a map, on in a mixed format of a cartogram, that is, a diagram superimposed on a map. (p. 4)

Furthermore, Semetsky (2004) also states images in cards, seen as symbols and signs are “ capable of changing their meaning dynamically depending on the context they are situated in” (p. 4), and that being a text, it can be interpreted to “having a potential transformational effect on the subject of a
reading functioning as a counseling session” (p. 4).

Radermarcher, L. (2011) also explained that the dialogue, which takes place during a divination consultation “can be seen as a meeting with a form of transpersonal intelligence” (p. i) in which symbols are understood in the object subject-relationship; the doing-being capacity; action-contemplations distinction; informative-empty message; the quick-slow action requirement presented; and the polarity presented in symbols. Radermarcher also explains that “not only does the symbol affect the perceiver’s being, it contains in itself a ‘dynamic’ quality of being” (p. 25). Radermarcher, L. (2011) further quote Scholem who wrote “something of the secret of man is poured into symbols; his very demands concrete expression. The great symbols serve to express the unity of his world” (p. 25).

Divination can be understood as an aim to obtain new information with the hope “to be empowered to lead a better life” (Radermarcher, L. p. 73). Divination questions can be seen as a way to uncover or look deeper into situations. Radermarcher, L. (2011) explains that the question “what should I do?” that underline a divination moment include the acquisition of cognitive knowledge and wisdom; the introduction of a moral dimension; the understanding of the participation of the inquirer; and a specific action to do. And in this way divination is not only about the future but is related to the present moment as the course of action that has to be taken refers to the now.

Indigenous people have used multiple ways of divination throughout time, from watching the sky and the rivers, and using sticks, bones, pebbles to working with text and images aiming to contact the Divine through the intricate

For the purpose of this dissertation the practice of divination selected, card reading- falls in the category of what Radermacher, L. (2011) described as a mixture of rational and non-rational practice, where “the divinatory act is a process of negotiation” (p. 83), between the rational and the ‘other’.

In relation to assignation of the roles of inquirer and diviner, I took both roles, since my goal in using divination in this research was mainly as a tool for self-reflection and to gain deeper understanding on the different process throughout the research.

The card deck, Medicine Cards created by Jamie Sams and David Carson (1988), was selected for this research due to its connection with Indigenous traditional knowledge regarding learning from observing animals. Cesar (2007) explains that in the development of self-consciousness animal behavior and moral characteristics have been used by different Indigenous groups to ensure a continuity of moral education and skill development. He also states animal figures have been used in diverse human and spiritual practices throughout history. Moral stories in which animals are the main characters come from a profound observation of animals and nature. Within the prehispanic cosmovision in Mexico, animals had a special place. They were part of the foundation of life and humanity, and were appreciated not only for their beauty, but were part of a complex and rich symbology that permeated all realms of existence. Animals are present in the codex Florentino in which birds and other animals are related with Gods and communicate important messages to humans (Becerril, n.d,)
Becerril (n.d) also states that animal observation has been used in the meteorological dynamics of farmers. She explains traditional meteorologists know and interpret animal behavior in climate prediction. Furthermore she states that traditional herbalist and Medicine people also have developed profound knowledge of animal behavior and their eating habits. This observation has allowed them to select the part of plants to be use and became aware of possible toxins or poisons to be avoided.

Currently animal observation still remains an important aspect of Indigenous life. In Mexico, the *Graniceros* predict climate based on animal conduct, and in Canada, Cree hunters have a keen knowledge about wild animals such as on caribou, moose and geese behavior, which is passed to the young generations through stories (Jimmy Fireman personal communication). Marie Battiste (2008), states Indigenous knowledge “embodies a web of relationships within a specific ecological context” (p. 501).

Animal observation has been part of Indigenous cultures since times prior to colonization. Today it still plays an important role in everyday life. Maldonado (2007) explains Guarani, Kichua and Aymara people from Bolivia use nicknames among them, based on animal features, which reflect their personality. He also states Andean people have a long history of using zoomorphic stories based in the comparison between human and animal behavior, resulting from a kin observation of nature.

Many naturalists have studied animal behavior throughout history. At present Ethology is an important branch of Biology that informs Medicine,
Psychology, Meteorology, Engineering, and Sociology among many other disciplines. Animal communication, emotions, learning, and sexuality are being examined through scientific lenses. New fields such as Neuroethology and Cultural Ethnology are being developed. Neuroethology focuses on the ontogenetic development of behavior related to neural mechanisms, while Cultural Ethnology is centered on the possibility of applying ethnology to the study of culture-specific human behaviors.

Based on the importance that animal observation has played and still plays in the life of Indigenous people, as well as my personal experience with Ethology during my undergraduate education as a Biologist, I selected the Medicine Cards deck for this study. I also select this deck based on the fact that both authors acknowledge, in the frontispiece of the book that accompanies the cards, their Indigenous teachers. This action reflects their understanding of Indigenous protocols. Carson wrote: “I would like to acknowledge my sweet medicine teachers, the women that passed to me the sacred teachings in trust: Opal, my mother; and my aunts Ruby, Agnes, and Phoebe” (Sams and Carson, 1998, p. 10). Sams expressed: “I would like to acknowledge the medicine teachers, the women and men who brought me through the void of Great Smoking Mirror. To Joaquin, my beautiful Mayan teacher; Grandfather Taquiz…Grandmother Twylah” (Sams and Carson, 1998, p.10). Finally both authors presented the traditional offering of their work to “all their relations” (p. 10), which gave me the certainty that the deck had been created within the understanding and honoring of Indigenous worldviews and protocols.

In the context of this dissertation, divination was used to deepen my understanding of being an Ally and to search for clarification when confronted with
tensions or contradictions in my journey. Also because one of the questions that I sought to answer through this study was if the practice of divination could be a useful approach to incorporate in research and Ally practice, I consulted the oracle “Medicine Cards” to unveil deeper layers of understanding regarding: my role as an Ally; and the teachings contained in Indigenous epistemologies.

Meditation

As a Buddhist practitioner meditation has been part of my life for many years and I have long known the benefits that come with its practice, both in spiritual development as well as in everyday life. In addition, as a researcher I decided to use this method, not only because it is aligned with Indigenous epistemologies, but also because it offers the space for deep reflection and self-grounding, needed in the Ally work. Furthermore it was appropriate to undergo the process of reflection regarding my participation in the structures of oppression and to sustain my emotional wellbeing throughout the Ally work.

Although there are many subjects of meditation and each culture has developed a special inclination toward one of them, meditation always involves focused attention and concentration. Within the framework of transpersonal psychology, meditation is also understood as “the process of cultivating or focusing one’s mind on mind, keeping it from wandering” (France, H., 2002, p. 14) resulting in an altering of consciousness and development of concentration, freeing oneself from its own inner destructive dialogue or intellect domination (France, H. 2002).

For the purpose of this research several techniques of Buddhist meditation practice were used in order to humbly notice my thought process and
allow me to be a more compassionate Ally. These were: mantra recitation, chanting, praying, and Mindfulness practice, which involves watching thoughts, emotions and sensations as they raised and dissolved in the mind.

My goal for using meditation as a research method in this dissertation was to sustain my awareness during the process of being an Ally, doing self-inventory, and keeping myself grounded while crossing difficult borders. According to France, H., (2002), “if people are more aware, they learn to trust their natural process” (p. 11). Based on that I believed meditation could offer me a way to become more confident in the natural process of becoming an Ally. Furthermore, since meditation can foster the capacity of self-reflection of ethical behavior (France, H., 2002), using meditation throughout the research could help me keep my actions aligned with those expected in a decolonizing methodology framework.

Meditating also aimed to allow a deeper understanding of events; release new knowledge; pacify emotions sustain the perception of ‘no-self’ (as explained in the previous chapter under Buddhist understanding of self), and the understanding of interdependence. Since there are many kinds of meditations, I decided to use for this study one called Mindfulness, which has already been used successfully to develop a therapeutic relationship and presence (Hick, S. & Bien, T., 2008).

**Mindfulness.**

Mindfulness practice plays a key role in the Buddhist tradition as well as in other Indigenous spiritual practices. Mindfulness is the English translation of the Pali word *Sati*, which refers to an action that can be experienced, but any
description can only be understood as a pointing out of the phenomenon and not the thing itself. According to Gunaratana (2002), “Mindfulness is the reality which gives rise to words - the words that follow are simply pale shadows of reality” (p. 149). It explains that the instant that exists prior to conceptualization, which is non-verbal and luminous, is the moment of pure awareness or mindfulness.


Defining mindfulness is a paradoxical undertaking, especially if one intends to use just words. For one thing, mindfulness really must be experienced to be understood. Furthermore, mindfulness can be considered a preconceptual and presymbolic notion. It is an embodied state of being that cannot be accurately described using language. (p. 3)

The practice of mindfulness has long been used by many ancient traditions to develop awareness, focus, calm, and wisdom. Mindfulness is a soft unfocused awareness state, which contains a deep knowing. Yet this moment disappears when we objectify things separating them from the matrix in which they exist by labeling them. Therefore Mindfulness is the act of letting go of the cognizing of perceptions and sensations. Furthermore, Mindfulness is non-judgmental observation, accepting just what is, and witnessing the arising and dissolution of every phenomenon.

Presently this practice has been described as “focusing attention, being aware, intentionality, being nonjudgmental, acceptance, and compassion” (Hick, S. & Bien, T., 2008, p. 5). The goal of this approach is to cultivate, sustain and integrate into every aspect of daily life a presence or awareness. Within a therapeutic relationship, mindfulness becomes a practice that enables the
therapist to pay attention with empathy and deep listening. According to Hick, S. & Bien, T., (2008). It is a shift “from a ‘doing mode’ to a ‘being mode’” (p. 5 quotations by the author).

At present Mindfulness practice is also an important component in other disciplines such as counseling, to help clients deal with anxiety, addictions and depression (Jones-Callahan, 2012), and in medicine to improve the healing process and reduce the intake of medications. A growing number of different practitioners such as social workers, doctors, therapists and counselors are showing interest in Mindfulness, both for themselves and their clients.

Within the realm of Mindfulness and health, Jon Kabat-Zinn (1990) is the best known pioneer. He developed the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program, at the University of Massachusetts in 1979. Through his 8-week program participants have experienced the need for fewer medications and an increase of self-esteem. With his book The Full Catastrophe, Kabat-Zinn (1990) made public his results to the medical world giving Mindfulness practice a respected position in that realm.

Mindfulness involves formal and informal practices. In the case of formal practice, mindfulness is carried out through meditation, focusing the mind on an object. Informal mindfulness practice is done by diligently observing one’s own actions while doing activities throughout the day. Examples of informal practice include mindful eating, mindful walking, mindful washing dishes, etc.

Although the literature review done for this research did not showed any reference to the use of mindfulness in the Ally work, my personal experience in this area made me included it as a possible method that would greatly benefit the Ally relationship and my role as an Ally.
**Prayers**

Baskin's (2005) said that spirituality is at the heart of Indigenous epistemologies, and it should be part of research, even when many would turn their eyes away when they heard such a word. Honoring Indigenous epistemologies and looking to follow Baskin’s advice, I selected two prayers to be said daily. One prayer, the opening prayer, was done every morning to start the day and as a reminder of bringing Spirituality into my work. The second one, closing prayer, was done at night just before sleeping in order to offer whatever benefit I had accomplished in the day to all beings. The later prayer also had the intention of reminding me of the notion of selflessness and the Indigenous protocol of acknowledging “all my relations”.

**Opening prayer for the day**

*Que mi mente se haga una con el Dharma*

*Que el Dharma triunfe en mi vida*

*Que mi confusión sea clarificada*

*Y que sea convertida en sabiduría*

**Translation-**

May my life be one with the Dharma

May the Dharma triumph in my Life

May my confusion be clarified

And may be transformed into wisdom

**Closing prayer for the day**

*By this merit may all obtain omniscience*

*May all defeat the enemy wrongdoing*

*From the stormy waves of birth, old, age, sickness and death.*

*from the ocean of Samsara*
May I free all being

Throughout my many lives and until this moment
whatever virtue I have accomplished
including the merit of this practice
this I offer for the benefit of all sentient beings

May sickness, war, famine and suffering
be decreased for every being

while their wisdom and compassion increase in this and in future lives

May I perceive all experiences to be as insubstantial
as the dream fabric of the night

and instantly be awake to perceive the pure light of every phenomenon.

May I quickly attain enlightenment to work ceaselessly
for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Meditation, mindfulness and prayers were used to help me ground myself throughout the whole process of this study, and especially when emotions, and feelings arising from the experience were too strong or painful, and I needed a way to let go of them. They were also used as a way of witnessing my experience and better reflect upon it. The formal mindfulness practice consisted on twenty minutes of practicing stillness daily and observing the stream of thought of my mind or following my breath noticing each inhalation and exhalation. The informal mindfulness practice was carried through the day. Signposts with the phrase “Be Present” were also placed around my house, in the car and in my iphone to constantly remind myself to pay attention to the present moment. The
insights of this approach are presented in Chapter Five.

**Dreams**

Dreams have been used by many cultures as a way of understanding self and as way of moving “beyond past, present and future” (France, H. 2002, p. 129). According to Van de Castle, R. (1995) “as early as the eight century AD, Tibetan Buddhist pursued the cultivation of dream lucidity [since] achieving mastery of lucid dreams was considered a prerequisite to seeking enlightenment” (http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/docview/432816107?accoun tid=14846).

Dreams have been an important practice of all religions. They played an important role in early Christianity and Islam (Van de Castle, R., 1995). Today we can still find this practice alive among Australian Aboriginal Spirituality, in First Nations traditions (France, H., 2002), and among Toltecs (Castaneda, C. 1998).

Within the realm of psychology, Sigmund Freud’s *Interpretation of Dreams* brought dreaming to the scientific community as a way of exploring the unconscious. For him “dreams served as a mechanism for discharging sexual and aggressive behavior. Everything in the dream could be explained and therefore interpreted” (France, H. 2002, p. 132). Jung differed with Freud in his understanding of dreams, presenting a new understanding of dreams, considering them “part of the collective consciousness in which the dream could be interpreted by examining mythology and legends” (Jung, C. 1964, cited in France, H. 2002, p. 132). Later on, Jung’s principles were used by Williams, S.K. to create *the Jungian-Senoi Dreamwork Manual*, where “it is not the interpretation
of the dream that is important, but actualizing the dream; that can bring meaning” (France, H. 2002, p. 132). Within transpersonal psychology, dreams are a vehicle “to relate to source experiences that do not have their origin in the ego or conscious self...with the idea to discover what the meaning is to oneself by dialoguing with the dream” (France, H. 2002, p. 134, 135).

Within the Indigenous traditions dreaming has been used to develop wisdom, travel across time and space, and as a way of “experiencing the world beyond themselves” (Frances, H. 2002, p. 136). Duran, E. (2000) reports the importance that sharing dreams has in many Indigenous communities, as well as the use of dreams to contact ancestors and prepare for dying. Among the Toltec tradition, Castaneda, C. (1994) explains dreams as the way to access “the general energetic flux of the universe” (p. 37), in order to achieve “the energetic body” (p. 40), or consciousness of body on the sleeping.

In the Buddhist Tibetan tradition, the dream practice receives the name of Dream Yoga, and requires initiation by a qualified Master. The purpose of this practice is to familiarize the practitioner with the dream state, so she/he can recognize external phenomena as dream-like phenomena and achieve liberation from Samsara (Gyaltrul Rimpoche, 1993).

Dream practices are not only interested in what happens when sleeping, but also in the moments of transition between states. In Tibetan Buddhism, these are call Bardos and are considered to be gaps in which sparks of understanding and realization can arise.

For the purpose of this dissertation any relevant information or insight resulting from dreaming was considered important data to reflect and act upon if necessary. The result of this work is presented in Chapter 5.
Art-Based Reflection

The use of arts as a method of inquiry goes back in time to the use of symbols among Indigenous cultures, yet as a rational-methodological approach it is relatively new. McNiff (2007) defined Art-based research as:

The systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies. These inquiries are distinguished from research activities where the arts may play a significant role but are essentially used as data for investigations that take place within academic disciplines that utilize more traditional scientific, verbal, and mathematic descriptions and analyses of phenomena. (p. 29)

In her research with graduate students using images as research method, McNiff (2007) found that art-making and dialoguing with images can bring important insights to a research endeavor and that art-based inquiry foster the use of a “creative intelligence” (p. 30). In addition she found that art-based research helped students access information, which “felt more accurate than the one obtained by conventional methods (p. 30). She explains:

I discovered how the idea of researching human experience through the arts makes complete sense to people, especially those of us who long to integrate art with service to others and revive partnerships between art and science...When difficulties in human experience become deeply lodged within individuals and groups, this is usually a sign that we are stuck in our ways of dealing with them. A shift in methodology can bring
tremendous insight and relief. The process of drumming, and the use of
our hands, bodies, and other senses as well as the activation of dormant
dimensions of the mind, may offer ways of solving and re-visioning
problems that are simply not possible through descriptive and linear
language. The art-based researcher asks these questions and then sets out
to design experiments and situations that will further offer understanding
of the phenomena. (p. 31-33)

According to Cathy Malchodi (2007), the arts are powerful and effective
forms of expressing ideas, feelings and portraying emotions. She wrote:

The visual arts - drawing, painting, and sculpture - are powerful and
effective forms of communication that have been used to convey
humanity's collective history, ideas, feelings, dreams, and inspirations. Art
has always been used to chronicle and portray a wide range of emotions
and experiences, from profound joy to the deepest sorrow, from triumph
to trauma. Since our earliest recorded history, art has also served as a
means of reparation, rehabilitation, and transformation and has been
used to restore physical, psychological, and spiritual wellbeing. (p. ix)

Furthermore she has expressed that “art can help people to authentically
express themselves, release powerful emotions, and transcend trauma” (p.x).

Malchodi (2007) has also expressed that through art making it is possible to:

Find relief from overwhelming emotions, crises, or trauma; discover
insights about yourself; achieve an increased sense of well-being; enrich
your daily life; or experience personal change. It is a way to make sense of
what is painful, to create personal meaning, to enhance wellness, and to
become whole. (p.x)
McNiff (2007) also explains that art making is a way of knowing and stimulates new insights and perceptions. According to him, the process of art making evokes different perspectives in the same way as when a story is told, as the conversation unfolds, new meaning appears. He also explains that by creating an artistic response to an event the relationship with it also expands to the degree that this engagement is methodically done and documented through art. Furthermore he states that the “art-based tools and ways of knowing [that come with them] take us out of our habitual responses to things” (p. 37).

In relation to the possible use of art-making to address serious emotional problems McNiff has stated that:

Art embraces ordinary things with an eye for their unusual and extraordinary qualities. The artist looks at banal phenomena from a perspective of aesthetic significance and gives them a value that they do not normally have. (p. 37)

Even though art is such a powerful tool for inquiry the work is not an easy one to do, as it brings about the need to let go of beliefs and be open to new discoveries and to change. Respect to this McNiff (2007) states:

The work is always challenging since we are generally not easily disposed toward establishing creative relationships with the things we oppose and to possibly changing attitudes that have defined who we are. Most of us find it very difficult to let go of our habitual ways of viewing the world, and it is more than likely that we manifest the same tendencies in our dealings with others. Change and insight in the personal realm are increasingly being recognized as a key source of corresponding social change. Therefore, the way in which we treat the humble images of our
Art-based research may have a definite impact on how we engage the world. (p. 37)

Although art-making can bring about different perspectives and stimulate new understandings, some authors consider art-based methods to be challenging since normally people have a resistance to shift perceptions or attitude. McNiff, (2007) considers that most people find it difficult to change worldviews but encourages the use of art-based methods to support change in the world. He states:

Rather than trying to fix problems with our points of view, we might focus more on knowing them in creative ways ... This expanded comprehension of experience, and how we go about pursuing it, may be more helpful than proving our positions in an absolute sense. (p. 38)

In addition, besides providing new perspectives, art-based approaches, allow contradictions and tensions that exist in the unconscious to arise and be seen. The common experiences of having conflicting thoughts or emotions that often constitute our internal dialogue can be acknowledge and find balance in our ambivalent mind.

Art-based inquiry can support dismantling structures of oppression and advance decolonization. To this regard, Bellengee-Morris, C, Sanders, J., Smith, D., and Staikidis, K., (2010) state:

Seeing art education research as a process through which we might more deeply explore forms of social and cultural production, enterprise, engagement and interaction, we ask how arts education can serve the critical social, political, ethical, and moral challenges facing troubled and constantly evolving (inter) cultural contexts. And through what research
methods, rituals of speaking, and/or forms of engagement can such causes be advanced. (p. 62)

**Art-making in Nahua epistemology**

According to Nahuas epistemology knowing or *tlamatiliztli* was a creative, and participatory action, which goal was to know the heart. In relation to this, Maffie, J. (2005), explains Aztecs engaged in artistic endeavors as a way of developing wisdom, and become balanced. Furthermore Aztecs considered that art-flower and song- are only the result of self-transformation aligning with the highest source. He states:

> Flower and song comes from a ritually prepared heart that embodies and presents a proper balance of reason and passion, male and female, active and passive (http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/)

Maffie (2005), also explains that Aztecs believed that “artistic activity epistemologically improves one’s heart, causing it to move in balance with *teotl* and hence move knowingly” (http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/). Also, that by “engaging in artistic work, Aztecs worked in their self-transformation” (http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/).

The balance that creativity and art brought to a person was symbolized in the image of *Quetzalcoatl* the plumed serpent. This figure consisting of bird and snake attributes was the representation of the connection of two worlds through the act of creativity. Maffie (2005) states: “*Quetzalcoatl’s* joint patronage of sages and artists points to their ultimate identity and to the equivalence of sagacity and artistic excellence” (http://www.iep.utm.edu/aztec/).
Seeing data

Diverse academic fields have addressed art-making and the study of art pieces. Art Therapy has focus on art making as a way of creating meaning; exploring emotions; resolving trauma; develop wellness; and as a spiritual path (Malchodi, 2007; Rubin, J.A., 2001). Three major psychological orientations have been used in art therapy: psychodynamic, humanistic and behavioral (Rubin, J. 2001).

For the purpose of this study a humanistic approach was chosen for art-based reflections, because Humanist art therapy approaches are based on three principles: (1) Clients are seen as having difficulties coping with problems in their life, and treatment is directed to reinforce the ability to find meaning. (2) Identity crisis may occur at any stage of life, and art therapy can be use as a preventive modality that enhances “curiosity, excitement, self-expression, and intimacy” (Rubin, 2001, p. 149). (3) Art therapy is an approach that can support self-actualization by “adding a spiritual dimension to it” (Rubin, 2001, p. 149).

Humanistic Art therapy approaches are interested in the phenomena of art making and the artist interpretation of the artwork. One of these approaches is the Phenomenological Art Therapy approach (Rubin, 2001, Carpendale; 2011), which addresses “the client’s direct experience of his production” (Rubin, 2001, p. 127). This approach is based on Betensky’s (1995, a) four-phase model that includes: creating the piece; distancing from the piece; intentional looking at the piece; description of the piece. Betensky’s (1995, a) model is often expanded with the creation of a poem or an art piece after the descriptions of art, inviting the client to explore the essence of the experience.
In the context of this research Betensky’s (1995, a) model was expanded and a poem was created for each art piece. In regard to creating poems, I engaged in what Aztec people called developing a teotlized heart and becoming knowledgeable of teotl through engaging in flores y cantos (flower and song), which was the name by which poetry was known by Aztecs. Because for Aztec people developing wisdom through creativity was considered the highest spiritual achievement and the only true way for self-transformation, I decide to honor this tradition and work following this approach. The self-reflection of my artwork was done using Betensky, (1975, a) model combined with the Aztec practice of teotl. The results of this experience are included in Chapter Six.
Paddling down the river

Fearful, joyous

Something new, something old

Learning to hear the wind singing it's teaching

Living

Holding tight to the Now
CHAPTER FOUR – MY STORY OF BEING AN ALLY

Context of the Work

The life of Indigenous people in Canada suffered important changes due to colonization and residential school. Before colonization communities took care of the basic needs of their Medicine people, honoring and respecting them profoundly, now a days, they have to self sustain, often enduring economic hardship, distrust and even aggression. In order to find ways by which they can make a living and fulfill their needs, and communicate their insights and teachings, some Indigenous medicine people, healers and spiritual teachers, have turned to the Internet as a possible platform for their work. Yet the lack of knowledge regarding the use technology makes this possibility difficult for most of them. In order to resolve this situation, some have asked for assistance to people with more experience with whom they enter into ally relationships.

The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges of assuming the role of Ally in a collaborative project. In this case working with a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher in the construction of a website to establish his online presence as a healer and Spiritual Teacher.
Rupert River

I saw your strength

Heard your power

Great teaching

Crossing is difficult

Not impossible

Nepantleando, exploring untold stories
My Story

When I arrived in Canada five years ago to become a permanent resident, I went straight from the Toronto international airport to live in a northern Indigenous community in James Bay, Quebec. My life partner, an Austrian, had lived most of his adult life in the Arctic and in Canada working with Indigenous communities, and now was opening a door to me to a world to which very few have access, and which I later found requires preparation.

As I began to work with and for Indigenous people together with my partner, I started to become aware of the negative impact that residential school and colonization had on Indigenous people and the kind of preparation that someone who wants to work in alliance with Indigenous people or communities needs to undergo.

Although I had always been attracted to Indigenous ways, I never imagined that I would be living in a reserve, nor that I would work with and for Indigenous people in Canada. I never imagined that I would enter into an alliance with a Plains Cree Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher to help him present and market his teachings online.

Allyhood sometimes comes as the result of witnessing oppression and wanting to participate in dismantling the structures of dominance. Other times moving to a different country with a new life partner places us in a position that will transform our lives. The second is my case. Following I will present my personal experience of establishing an alliance with a Medicine Man; the complexities that this work presented and the methods I used to be an Ally with him.
Amorphous

Shape and Form in silent development

Juxtaposed

Imposed

Negotiated

Cultural

Interdependent

...

Mindful attention is needed
Me - The Ally

As part of the decolonizing methodologies and within the protocols of respect embraced by Indigenous people, it is a custom to always introduce oneself. Yet even though this is something I do on a daily basis, when looking deeply at the questions “Who are you?” it becomes more complicated. To say I am Andrea or call myself an Ally are only two labels that I have become used to, but do not define who or what am I.

It is also clear that the one writing the dissertation is certainly not the one that started the PhD programs almost four years ago. New aspects of me have emerged, and others have changed or gone. New dialogues and thoughts emerged as the researcher-collaborator-ally identity emerged. The place from where this new identity sprang became an important point of exploration that needed to be included in this dissertation, since throughout the process of my inquiry I have paid mindful attention to the birthing and dissolution of identities presenting themselves in an almost magically fluid way.

Similar to the process of image development in art, my identities took shape and developed silently. In awe, I noticed the structural lines of identities appearing and disappearing. I saw the multiple forms and shapes they hold and enjoyed or suffered with the juxtapositions created between some of the displays of my identities and those of professors, friends, and family members.

As I started to pay attention to the different raisings of identities, I became aware that when I go to my mom’s house I am her daughter. The people taking care of her refer to me as the boss. In Tango class I am a dancer, either follower or leader. The choir conductor refers to me as a soprano. My children
call me mother, and for my students I am their teacher. For some men I have been an object of pleasure and for others a threat.

I also realized that my identity is also defined based on the place I was born and grew up, which makes me a Mexican, but based on the place I live now, I am a Canadian landed immigrant. If the color of my skin is brought into the equation I am a person of color which has led to being a subject of discrimination, especially crossing the USA border, but has also presented itself as an asset and has opened the doors to work in Indigenous communities, where I am regarded as one of them.

Based on economics and life style I was born and raised as a middle class girl conformed to consumerism. I have experienced the privilege of attending private schools and obtaining a higher education. My teachers and classmates have called me a rebel, an activist, and a pacifist.

Throughout time I have seen myself in the role of student, researcher, biologist, music teacher, therapist, photographer, acupuncturist, and Buddhist practitioner to name a few aspects of my self-identity. And lately as I have engaged in the process of understanding decolonization I have come to see myself also as a Mestiza, which is just another label. One that connects me with a special group and disconnects me from others. I have become a collaborator, an Ally, and a decolonizer.

It seemed and still seems impossible to define who I am, as its amorphous quality makes it slippery to the analytic mind, which struggles unsuccessfully to define the boundaries that can define me. I am not the same person that came out of my mother's womb, nor am I the same person I was ten or twenty years
ago. At a cellular level, none of the original cells I was born with are present today in my body, and my thoughts and my emotions have also changed.

Throughout my life I have created and recreated myself many times. My identities have appeared and disappeared, as the occasion has demanded. They have changed in a continuous basis throughout time. Yet, in the course of a never stopping narrative I have managed to construct and sustain a sense of self for many years. Through an intricate self-created story, I have validated emotions, thoughts, and actions that give me sense of being in space and time.

Society has constantly required me to create and recreate my story and identity. It has forced me to display a persona and even to prove its legitimacy in many different ways. I have been forced to use a simple piece of paper, called a birth certificate, to prove I am alive; a passport to confirm that I am Mexican; and a license that states I am capable of driving vehicles safely.

On very few occasions and just for an instant, while sitting in meditation, I have lost the sense of identity merging into something or someone for which I have no words. Those moments of selflessness have allowed me to feel part of a bigger whole, find purpose in life, and develop respect for all beings.

My sense of self or identity though constantly fluctuating, directs my actions everyday making me feel most of the time as a real and solid entity, therefore believing there is a separate unit which is “me” and I am “not generally sent into a metaphysical spin’ about [my] own ontological status” (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p.68), when I refer to myself or to others.

On the other hand, the depth to which this research required me to constantly be aware of my beliefs, thoughts and actions, urged me to consider the role of concept of identity in the Ally work and the decolonizing process.
Although my intention for this dissertation was not to do a full philosophical exploration of the concept of identity, the differences that exist between the Western, Eastern and Indigenous views regarding interdependence, and individualism are crucial to understand and work within decolonizing methodologies. Furthermore the quintessence of my research is based in the exploration and development of the Ally identity, and embracement of a Mestizo identity.
Ancestral Wisdom
Reaching the sky
Retrieving
Sharing
Initiation
**Chepwapisk: the Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher**

I have always had an interest in Spirituality and Indigenous wisdom. When I arrived in Canada, I wanted to meet a Medicine Man or Woman and learn about First Nation’s traditional spirituality and ways of being. To my fortune, one of my partner’s old friends was a Medicine Man, Chepwapisk, a Plain Cree Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher from Northern Manitoba, who had left his reserve to become what many called an “urban Indian”. He travelled all over North America doing “doctorings” and ceremonies and is knowledgeable in healing plants.

When I met him, I was surprised to feel the same easiness and freedom I had felt with the Tibetan Lamas. He was gentle and easy going and showed true interest in others. He had an excellent sense of humor and loved to tell stories. It did not take much time before I felt connected with him and recognized the wisdom that he had developed through his practice and life. Yet to my surprise he refrained of talking about spirituality and whenever the subject came, he gently shifted it to something different. I was not sure why he acted like that but it was clear he did not wanted to enact his role as Medicine person with me, and all I had to do was to accept it and respect it.

After this initial encounter, we met numerous times, and always refrained from talking about spirituality or healing. I could not understand why he was so reluctant to talk with me about his work, as by that time we were good friends, until finally one day he looked at me seriously and told me: “if you want to know more about this, you have to give me an offering”. I was surprised and did not know what he was talking about. Confused about his comment, the only thing that came to my mind was to buy him a little basket with candies and leave it for
him to pick it up at my hotel when I left Winnipeg.

I was ignorant of the protocols regarding receiving teachings within First Nations and from Medicine People. Being in a different culture, I was often being in a position of not understanding how to proceed, what was correct and what was not.

Chepwapisk did not call me to thank me for the candy basket or talk with me about anything for quite a while. This made me even more confused and was not sure what was going on. I felt I had done my job and he would be open to tell me his secrets, but it was evident that was not the case.

Many months later when we connected again on the phone, he told me I should do things properly and "offer him tobacco". His statement made me aware of the delicate request I was trying to make and made me wonder of the responsibilities of becoming his student.

So far I had only been curious about Indigenous spirituality, very similar to how spiritual tourism takes place, superficial and moved by novelty. And since I was already following the Buddhist spiritual path I was not sure if I would like to commit to another teacher, so for many months I did not asked him anymore questions about his work, nor did I offered him tobacco. Whenever we encountered each other, we spoke about our personal lives; he told funny stories; and occasionally mentioned the effect of residential schools on his people, and the limitations he felt in helping them.
Establishing the Alliance

One day as Chepwapisk was visiting me in my house in Victoria, knowing that I used the Internet to promote my workshops he asked me about the possibility of using this medium to share his own teaching and reaching other populations. Aware of the uniqueness of this opportunity I immediately agreed to work with him, since I was convinced that he had much to share. It was a one in a lifetime opportunity for me to work with him and explore at deeper level his life and teachings, something I anticipated would be necessary in order to develop his online presence. Although the request to collaborate had come from him, I knew that in order for me to work closely with him, ask him questions, and even confront some of his ideas, I had to engage in some kind of student-Spiritual Teacher relationship. Therefore, through a tobacco offering ceremony, I humbly requested him to teach me and asked him permission to present the process and results of the work we did together as my dissertation. I explained to him I would also be paying attention to my own personal process and experience working with him as an Ally. He asked me to explain to him what I meant by Ally and said he had never heard of that term before. At that time I realized that language I had learned at the university was something that, although was common to all Indigenous scholars, was not for non-academics.

He agreed to teach me, and from that day on our relationship became deeper. Our encounters became full of teachings, and inspirational words and my understanding of the life of a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher was expanded.
Our daily strolls through the many parks that exist in the city of Victoria, became moments of instruction for me as well as of inspiration. He taught me about medicinal plants and ways to honor and take care of the land. He explained to me:

When taking, you must always give back. Offer tobacco first, do a prayer and then take what you need. Never cut a plant or take anything from anyone, without giving something in return, but better to offer first and then take.

Having in my mind his teaching on offering before taking, and knowing he had no computer at home, something important to have when working on developing a presence on line, my partner and I decided to give him my partner’s old computer. He had recently bought a new one and had not yet had time to sell the old one. Chepwapisk accepted gladly and immediately began to learn how it worked. Although giving him the computer allowed him to start working on his own, being new in the Ally academic work, made me unsure about how this action could fit within Ally work. On one side I felt this could be understood as an offering protocol or taking care of the participant (Baskin, 2005). But it could also be reinforcing dependency acting as a nice Samaritan. I noticed the line that separated these two opposites was narrow and was difficult to align with some of the more rigid literature on Allyhood.

Preparing for the Work

Once Chepwapisk returned to Winnipeg after the visit in which we agreed to work together, we began to exchange ideas through telephone conversations
and through the software Skype. At the beginning, we were both confronted with technological difficulties that took some time to be resolved. One of them was communication online.

Prior to the collaborative work, Chepwapisk had never used any kind of software to communicate with anybody online. So the first thing we resolved together was the technical problem for him in using Skype (software that allows voice and image communication). Through multiple telephone sessions, I guided him, step by step through the process from accessing the program in his computer, to placing the call on Skype.

It became clear to me the limitations that he had regarding the use of technology and made me reflect on how Residential School had created a gap in education that affects Indigenous people today and is not easy to resolve.

**Real Time vs. Academic Time**

Even though Chepwapisk and I were both eager and ready to begin the work right away, I had to ask him for a time to fulfill university requirements to work with him. I needed to present my research proposal; the candidacy exams; and obtain ethics approval. Although Chepwapisk was very patient and always understanding, based on his tone of voice and how he did not connect with me for a while made me think maybe this situation was very frustrating and disappointing for him. I was obviously delaying his expected remuneration from the website, and although this project was mostly academic, for him it was a way of making a living.
In order to ameliorate some of his discomfort with me fulfilling university requirements, and hoping to advance in the project, I asked him to begin exploring websites of other Spiritual teachers, to see what kind of elements he would like to incorporate on his own. I also proposed to use this time to reflect upon the teachings he wanted to share, and the population he wanted to address.

Even though I worked as fast as I could to fulfill the academic obligations, it took many months before I could present my candidacy exams and get ethics approval for the project. During that time he became more distant with me and instead asked my partner if he could do the website for him.

This situation placed me in a personal dilemma, and made me feel very uncomfortable. On one hand, I felt being in a colonial position of taking care of my own agenda, instead of working with him according to his needs. On the other hand I was following the academic protocols to ensure he would not be hurt or abused in this study. Feeling a deep contradiction and a sense of impotence I decided to consult the oracle Medicine Cards.

I took out the deck of Medicine Cards and proceed to do a one-card consultation. I spread all the cards in front of me and with my eyes closed and holding in my mind the question:

*Tengo que presentar mis candidatura, y no se como hacerle para balancear mi trabajo de Aliado con los requisitos universitarios.*

(Translation- I need to present my candidacy exams, and I do not know how to balance the Ally work with the university requirements.)
A blank card came as a result. The deck has a couple of blank cards, in case the consultant wants to draw a special animal or the like. I normally take them out when I do a consultation, but this time, I forgot to do that, and it appeared as a response. My first impulse was to take another card, but then I decided to ponder on the concept of a blank card.

I sat in silence and these words surfaced in my mind as a silent response: “There is no answer for your question, it is something you will have to figure out as you walk the path.” At that moment I realized that I was truly walking unexplored territory, Nepantleando and Doing Mestiaje (Anzaldúa, 1999) and that it would be up to me to decide the route to follow. It also made me reflect upon the importance of my work, and the responsibilities that were coming with it.

I began to ponder about the complexities that doing Ally work presented in an academic context. I also realized, that I should have foreseen that obtaining the ethical approval would take a long time, as the process is lengthy especially when involving sensitive populations. I thought I should have explained to him from the beginning my situation with the university, giving him the opportunity to decide if he wanted to wait for me or look for someone else with whom to work.
Although my intention had never been to act like a colonizer, I noticed my agendas were coming as more important than those of my friend and how this was in contradiction with the kind of relationship I wanted to have as an Ally.

I had jumped to a collaboration for which I was not yet ready. I had many limitations in establishing a “proper Ally relationship” and I needed to confront them and resolve them. My inner judge shouted to me “You should have done better, you are not entering an Ally relationship, colonizer, colonizer colonizer!”

This rigid and critical inner judge came back many times during the course of this research. Its words were those of books and articles I had read and conversations with scholars. Most of the time it presented itself as a critic yet without offering alternatives to the dilemmas.

In order to counterbalance the inner judge I took a look again to the blank card and then sat in meditation. The blank card was also an invitation to remember that pounding voices have to be dissolved into beingness. There I would find the ultimate answer, one that would be compassionate to both of us.

**Entering the Path**

Once I got the ethics approval I immediately contacted Chepwapisk to start working on the project. I told him I could start any moment and asked him about any preparation he would recommend or require from me before starting. He did not suggest anything special but said to do what I always do. So I went to my Buddhist retreat center in New York State and entered a one-month retreat as a cleansing ceremony. I also thought this decision would be in accordance with and respectful of Indigenous epistemologies.
Once I finished the retreat, I called Chepwapisk to start working with him. I asked him about his experience exploring other websites and he mentioned to me that he had not done such exploration, not knowing where to start or where to look for them. When I realized he had been made to do a work that he had no idea where to start I felt very bad as my collaboration with him, was far from being one of an Ally.

Immediately I explained to him how to use search engines such as Google to look up other Spiritual Teachers work. I assured him that I myself would look for sites and would send him links to review. We agree on the work to be done and planned for a new conversation in a week or two.

During informal conversations in the past, he had commented on his desire to approaching children with his teachings. I focused my Google research on Indigenous websites with a pedagogical background as a priority. I found the site http://fourdirectionsteachings.com, and sent it for his comments. When I called him two weeks later to hear his comments on the link, as well as to see which ones he had selected on his own, he told me he considered the site I had sent him, childlike and boring. Because I thought the site was very well done, and the information relevant, I became confused about the kind of website he had in mind for his own.

Therefore, in order to gain a clearer understanding of the kind of website he wanted, I asked him to establish first of all the audience he wanted to reach. At first he said he wanted to reach Indigenous people, but then he changed his mind for a white Western adult target, but then again back to a children and school population. For more than a month, every time we communicated online or by phone, he would tell me about a different idea regarding the audience as
well as the kind of teachings to be transmitted through his page. This situation made me very confused not only about the population to be targeted, but also on how to proceed in working with him. In my desire to support him as an Ally, I sent him a series of websites to look at hoping to help him get ideas and define his own.

When time passed and he did not contact me I called him and asked him his opinion about the website. He answered me:

“I have not looked at them, went to do a sweat lodge, what do you think we should put on mine?”

His response was very surprising and confusing for me. On one hand I felt annoyed that he had not done the work he had said he would do and on the other made me fearful that the work would not continue affecting my academic work. My agenda and his were once again colliding with each other. To my discomfort my colonizer/Ally dichotomy became activated and a battle emerged once more in my mind.

On one hand I could recognize that as Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher he needed to do his work, which was doctoring and doing healing ceremonies. Yet on the other, the construction of the website was a collaborative process and we needed to work together. Also I wanted to work with him from a decolonizing Ally perspective. I did not wanted to impose my “expert” point of view. I wanted to work with him and not exercise power over him (Bishop, 1994), but somehow I was finding it difficult to do so. I needed basic information to start building the website and was not sure if my actions were not allowing for this to happen. The complexities of being an Ally were surfacing and required me taking some actions, although I was not sure which ones.
I suggested to Chepwapisk that we go through the websites together, and I asked him if he would like to come to Victoria and start the work together anytime soon. In this way we would be able to look at the websites together and make decisions regarding design elements and content.

Chepwapisk agreed to come and we established a date that he would come to Victoria. During that time and as a starting point for thinking about possible themes for the audios to be included, and personally feeling his story of becoming a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher was very interesting, I suggested that he think about what he would like to share. To this he responded in a gentle voice after reflecting for a few seconds: “that sound good, I will give it some thought, and I will think about other teachings too” agreeing to talk once again soon.

In this relationship it took me some time and a lot of anxiety to understand what “I will think about it” really meant, and how much time was involved in “talking soon”. Although at the beginning I was never sure what that meant or how much time he needed to think out things, I came to realize, that when he said “thinking” he meant entering a deep mental process that could take a lot of time.

Many weeks passed since the conversation in which I proposed that he share his life as a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher without him contacting me again. I tried to reach him many times unsuccessfully. I was not sure where he was, and my anxiety began to rise again. Once more fear of not accomplishing my academic work became present. I had to book his flight and was feeling the project was more important for me than to him. As an Ally I felt my role was to wait and adjust to his time and necessities, yet this was very difficult because I
had my own motivation for the work. Being an Ally was very complex and I
began to question the concepts of Ally and alliances.

Based on the Free Online Dictionary by Farlex definitions of alliance
include: “a) A close association of nations or other groups, formed to advance
common interests or causes. b) A formal agreement establishing such an
association, especially an international treaty of friendship.”
(http://www.thefreedictionary.com/alliance). I believed our alliance was based
on an agreement, but we might not necessarily be sharing at this point a common
interest. Therefore I thought I had to clarify this with Chepwapisk some time
soon, so both our needs could be met.

After some weeks he called and I asked him if he had thought about the
possibility of telling his story for the website. He responded: “oh yes, I have been
thinking about it. It is a good idea. It has been good... oh yea”, but gave no more
information. It was not a yes or no answer leaving me not knowing if that would
be done and if so when.
Jail without bars
Imposed, and self imposed
Always running
Remembering,
Expecting
Some gentle and long
Other fast and short
And the Now?
The Right Time

The perception of time, was one of the many differences that Chepwapisk and I faced during the process of this research. I knew his sense of time was very different from mine, because he was a Medicine Man. Maybe this difference was the result of having grown up in different environments. He had spent much time in the bush and I had been a city girl.

Whatever had created this difference it created stress for me as I constantly felt things should happen faster than they did. At one point I was feeling anxious and wanted to push things to move faster, he told me: “things have to be done, when they have to be done, not after and not before” leaving me speechless. I knew his words were true and wise, yet they did not resolve my anxiety to move forward in the dissertation.

Feeling there were many things that had to be resolved and not finding the way to make them work due to our geographical situation, I decided to either go to Winnipeg and work with him, or invite him to come to Victoria to work. I asked him what would be his preference and he immediately decided to come to Victoria. He explained to me that in Winnipeg we would not be able to work due to the many people that constantly knock at his door asking for help. Until that moment I had not been aware of the demand that his work had nor the responsibility that entailed being a Medicine Man. I felt grateful of having the possibility of being with him.

One week later Chepwapisk arrived at Victoria airport happy and smiling as always. He came out with no luggage except for a small wooden box and very small backpack. The wooden box was his Spiritual equipment, consisting of an
eagle feather, incense, tobacco, a crystal and some herbs. The backpack contained his personal toiletries and maybe a piece or two of clothes. I was surprised to see how light he travelled and somewhere inside me I felt the desire of being able to travel like him.

I invited him for breakfast and on the way he blessed my car and all other cars we passed by, mountains and the air and greeted every tree or plant he encountered in this way. He told me “you know you are only a particle on the universe and you need to understand this”. Then changing the theme abruptly he commented:

Your question about how I had become a Medicine Man has been the most difficult question I have had to think about in a long time. It made me remember times in my life that I had put away because they were very painful. It was a very hard question to think about. It made me feel again anger and being depressed… but it was a good question... yea very good.

His comment made me feel very bad, since I had never imagined my suggestion on recounting the story of how he had become a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher would send him into such a deep process. I asked him to forgive me and assured him that his life story did not have to be included in the website or in the project at all. Feelings of being a colonizer emerged in me, as I felt I had intruded into his emotions with my questions, and hurt him by asking him to bring to the surface painful memories. I sat in silence while he continued blessing people, buildings and birds on the road. A feeling of guilt accompanied me all the way to the restaurant. I had contributed to open a wound and was not sure how to proceed.
When we arrived at the restaurant he ordered a plate of eggs, coffee and pastry, and ate them with absolute delight, as if it was the best meal of the world. Watching him eat with so much delight made me forget the guilt I was carrying with me bringing back to the present moment.

Once he finished his breakfast I took him to his hotel to rest. We agreed he would call me to pick him up once he had rested. I went back home to prepare for working with him and to process the many emotions I had experienced in the morning.

At 4 pm he called me to pick him up. I brought him to my home where I had already prepared paper and crayons to start working. But instead of focusing on the work he asked for tea and sat on the sofa to chat with my partner. By 6 pm he asked to go eat and then to drive him back to the hotel. We had not worked on the website and I was confused about why he had not brought up the theme at all. I also noticed I was so careful of being “respectful” that neither had I mentioned the website or the work we had to do.

My anxiety regarding a time frame began to emerge once again. With a big effort I forced myself to be silent. I was still feeling badly about his morning comment regarding my question of his life as a Medicine Man. Then several voices began to debate in my head. “You have to start; you are losing time; let him rest; follow protocols; which protocols?” I focus on my breath and gently brought myself back to a space of calm and acceptance.

The following day things did not change much. He came for breakfast and then went for a walk, ate lunch and rested on the sofa to later chat with my partner, had dinner and asked to be taken to the hotel. By that time I began to doubt if there had been a misunderstanding about the purpose of his visit to
Victoria. My anxiety had grown to a level that I could not control it any more. Mindfulness practice was not something that I could remember at that moment when I was about to ask him what his plans were for the next day, when he told me: “Tomorrow we will start the work, come pick me up at 8 am”. My breath came back and I relaxed, I guess this was the right time for him to start working.

**Phase 1**

The next day I picked up Chepwapisk very early from his hotel and brought him to my home for breakfast. After eating happily as always, he went again for a walk and then came back and said he was ready to start working. Immediately I brought two poster size white papers and told him we should do a brainstorm to define what he wanted to do and could do. Based on literature reviewed regarding collaboration processes, I had found Herron’s (2007) cooperative inquiry the most appropriate.

Within the frame of cooperative inquiry four-phase reflection cycle would be used (Heron, J. 2007) to explore possibilities. Through cooperative inquiry I wanted to reposition myself from being a positivist researcher to being a collaborator.

Chepwapisk and I had a long brainstorm session in which we explored all the possibilities he could achieve with a website. This exploration covered doing an educational website for children to selling products online to all cultures. Finally Chepwapisk expressed his interest in having white European people as possible targets for his website. He said: “Indigenous people would not pay for my teachings, they have no money and they always want the government or
someone to pay for everything”.

This situation made me uncomfortable as his direction was the
comodification of his teachings, and possibly present them as ‘exotic” to attract
European or white spiritual tourists. I was not sure how to proceed yet I believed
that as an Ally I had to support his decisions and help him achieve his goals. Yet
my own morality and beliefs of decolonization demanded I process this situation
before proceeding.

I asked myself if Chepwapisk desired this to be an advancement on
Indigenous Spirituality or not; if he was exercising his right of self-expression as
a human being; and if I would react different if a non-Indigenous person wanted
to sell his knowledge on Internet. I had no answer. This experience was
presenting the complexities that accompany decolonization and the difficulties
and personal confrontations with the belief that accompanied an Ally
relationship.

I did not wanted to contribute to the destruction of cultural heritages, nor
reproduce Indigenous stereotypes. Yet I could understand Chepwapisk’s needs
for finding a new way for making a living.

After pondering for some time the situation I came to the conclusion that
Chepwapisk was entitled to decide his own representation and do whatever he
wanted with his own insights and knowledge. Yet I thought it was correct for me
to share my feelings and doubts, so I told him I was very worried about doing
something that would be colonizing or could hurt Indigenous people. After
listening to me very attentively and taking the time to find the words to respond
to me he told me: “this teachings are not mine, they belong to nobody except
Spirit. If they can help anyone, that is good... I can also colonize them back yeah”
The idea of colonizing back Westerners was an interesting view, one which resonated with me to a deeper level. I was also convinced that Spirit was something missing in the Western materialistic culture and that somehow this had to be developed. I was not sure if selling teachings would contribute to what the Tibetan Master Chogyam Trungpa (1973) had called Spiritual materialism, but could also benefit Westerners or anyone who listened to his teachings. He was certain that his teachings could benefit all kinds of people and I felt we could explore that possibility together.

I began to see Chepwapisk had his own ideas about decolonization, and that his website could be in a way an interesting contribution to the process of decolonization. His teachings could make Western people see a different perspective of life. Since my role as an Ally (Bishop, 1994), was to support Chepwapisk to accomplish his goals and not to impose my ideas and beliefs, and feeling he had his own way of decolonizing I focused on helping him accomplish his goal.

**Phase 2**

According to Herron's (2007) approach to cooperative inquiry the second phase consists of carrying on what was planned in phase one. This was the time to record his teachings and construct the website.

So after picking Chepwapisk from his hotel and having breakfast I took out the audio recorder to begin the work. He asked me if we would do a videotape as well, which started a conversation about multiple possibilities, such as having takes of him in nature. Since I had not prepared with appropriate technology, nor had been trained in ethnographic videotaping, I suggested to
focus only on voice. As he insisted it was my duty was to support him and not to impose my ideas I decided to follow his lead and go for the videotaping. I knew uploading video would be more difficult than audios on the Internet but was willing to find a way of making that possible for him.

When I turned on the video camera, he became nervous and the flow and easiness that characterized his teaching was gone. He could not talk from inspiration and asked me to present him some questions for him to elaborate on.

At this moment I realized that a change of plans like this required at least someone behind the camera and that a place where he felt more comfortable and so that the interview would be more informal. I asked my partner to help us with the camera and went to a location outdoors.

After reviewing the material, Chepwapisk and I agreed that the material was not commercial and decided to go back to the original plan of audiotapes. Once again I felt I was not doing a proper work. Allowing Chepwapisk to take the lead in an area he was not knowledgeable had made us lose a day of work.

**First Audio Recording**

Chepwapisk asked me to help him find themes that would be interesting for Western people. He was not sure what kind of information would be more appealing to them and wanted my input. I was not expecting this to happen after the experience of asking him to share his life story of becoming a Medicine Man.

Afraid of saying the wrong thing or imposing my ideas I remained silent and instead went to the kitchen to prepare food. As I chopped vegetables I kept thinking what is going on here has not been included in any of the Ally literature I have reviewed so far. How have scholars resolved these dichotomies? What
should I do now? On one hand I believed that having been raised in a Western society, I had a good idea of what Western spiritual seekers could be interested in, yet on the other hand I did not want to make his teachings a spiritual tourist attraction and preferred that he decide what was best to do.

To calm my mind and let go of the millions of thoughts that were running by, I focused on chopping food. I placed my attention on the edge of the knife and forced myself to notice the moment in which it made contact with whatever I was cutting and follow the movement until the piece was completely cut. After cutting a couple of carrots into small pieces, my mind was already more at peace and my anxiety was starting to vanish.

After an hour of working in the kitchen, I returned to work with him. To my fortune he had already made up his mind about the theme he would talk about. This was “Indianness”. At first I felt this was very broad, yet by the time we finished recording, the name had already changed to the Seven Directions and the recording had come to be a very interesting teaching.

We spent several hours recording the teaching. At first he showed signs of being nervous, similar as when we tried videotaping his teachings. But then he became relaxed and forgot there was a recorder in the room.

The Seven Directions teaching is a developmental model that explains the process from the birth of an idea to the creation of a belief and theory, as well as the evolutionary process of inner Spirit. This teaching presents Chepwapisk’s cosmovision, while exposing the cognitive traps that prevent the recognition of “Spirit” as the true nature of self. It also invites the audience to explore what sustains their beliefs, habits and fears. This teaching reminded me of the
Buddhist notion of selflessness and the Toltec teachings of Don Miguel Ruiz regarding the development of belief systems.

This was the only audiotape we did together. Afterwards, when he went back to his home, he recorded two more audiotapes. One of them talks about fasting, how it is done and the benefits of doing fasting and the other talks about the importance of having a purpose in life.

**Constructing the Website - Visual Representation**

Once we had finished recording “The Seven Directions” we focused on the design elements for the website. After a couple of hours of thinking about the domain name he decided to call it “Teachings of a Medicine Man”. Then I proceed to buy the domain name and the Internet hosting service. This had to be done in my name, since he had no credit card. As an Ally I had to make these kinds of arrangements, which demanded a lot of responsibility for me. Although the cost was not much, I had to absorb it taking full responsibility over the site and what came on it. This made me reflect on the limitations to technology, and entrepreneurship that many Indigenous people face today, as well as the strength of friendship and relationship that is needed to work in this kind of collaboration.

Once we had the domain name and the hosting site, we spent several hours looking at different websites together. We reviewed the websites I had sent him previously that he had not been able to access and explored them.

After looking at many websites, we focused on four that he liked that had an online store or were selling a spiritual service. These were the sites of: Toltec,
Chepwapisk selected layouts, backgrounds, fonts and images he liked and we began to design his own. Together we concluded his website would have a home, about us, teachings and ceremonies, spiritual advice, store, blog, and contact pages. Yet for the final website the blog and spiritual advice pages were removed since he did not feel confident in writing nor about charging for healing or spiritual advice.

Since I had planned to use iWeb software for the construction of the site, I showed him the different templates available in this software. Chepwapisk selected the White Modern Template, but asked me to decide the layout. He said: “You are the artist, you decide what to do to make it look nice”

Since I thought he had to be the one deciding his own representation, I asked him to choose from the pictures I had collected the ones he wanted to go on the home page. Then I told him we would create page by page together. I assured him he could count on my artistic opinion, but he would have to make the ultimate decision for each page.

Deciding on the white background, we started working placing text and images. As an Ally I wanted to empower him and make sure he knew that he was the one creating his own website, and I was just a collaborator. I asked him to choose images for the other pages, and asked him to think when he got back to Manitoba about the texts to be included in the “About me” and “home” pages. He agreed and the next day Chepwapisk left for Winnipeg and I began the construction of the home page with the images he had selected.
Redefining Style

After I finished the first draft of the website, I sent it to him asking him for his opinion. Chepwapisk called some days later explaining he was having technical problems with his computer and was not able to open the site. I guided him to share his screen with me, and step by step we solved his problem. Working with him as an Ally demanded me resolving technical problems, and helping him use software and equipment. At times I felt overwhelmed by the amount of work and responsibility that was on my shoulders and wondered if I was not taking on more than I should. Yet every night when I said my “closing prayer” it reminded me that the work I was doing was not for my own benefit but for all sentient beings. I remembered Chepwapisk and I were “One” and the work felt less of a burden. The following day I would feel more refreshed and willing to make changes and improve the website.

One of the things I felt needed improvement or at least to be reconsidered, was the seriousness and minimalistic style of the website. Chepwapisk had chosen the White Modern Template, but my intuition keep telling me his choice had come from not being able to image how it would look in other templates.

Hoping to offer more options from which to choose, I decided to replicate the whole site in the other two different templates. Although this action could be misinterpreted as colonial and not proper for an Ally relationship, as a friend I felt obliged to give him more options. Looking at empty templates was very different from looking at websites completely finished.

Two new options were presented. One had a vibrant colorful background and the other a combination of soft earthy colors. This last one based on the
website of the Mexican Spiritual teacher Don Miguel Ruiz, which he had liked so much when we had reviewed the websites together.

Confident of having created alternatives for Chepwapisk to choose from, I uploaded the three sites and asked him to choose one or a combination of them. Immediately he chose the website with the earthy tones saying: “this looks more Indigenous”. He also expressed his surprised about how changing the template could create such a shift in the feeling of the site.

**Weaving Sounds**

Transcribing and preparing Chepwapisk’s audio teachings for the website was a very interesting although long and difficult process for me. As I began to work with the audios, I noticed first of all the existence of long moments of silence, and second that he did not follow a linear logical Cartesian progression in his teachings and explanations. His way of teaching was more like a dance in which he visited and revisited the theme, from different points of view, allowing the listener the opportunity of seeing different angles of the topic.

Chepwapisk’s way of teaching, had a huge impact on our relationship as we both process information in a very different way. Even though I was aware of the differences between Indigenous ways and non-Indigenous ways of knowing, I had never experienced it so clearly as this time.

One of the differences that I noticed was related with Tempo. His was slow and with long periods of silence, which often made me hesitate about asking him a new question to help him continue with his teaching or not. Yet I also felt that during those long moments of silence, Chepwapisk was going
through a profound reflection and touching a reality that I could only sense
sometimes but could not tell what it was.

Although watching him sit in silence was a very interesting experience,
when heard as an audiotape, had a very different feeling and had to be cut out, to
allow fluidity to his teachings, and keep people's attention as they listened to
him.
Collaboration

Judging and being judged

Unexpected

Anxiety

Equality

Nepantleando,

Growth
**Trickster at play**

Even though at first glance collaboration seems like an easy thing to do, working under the framework of a decolonizing methodology became more complex, as I often fell into the advocacy role instead of that of an Ally. As a Mexican mestiza, raised to see Indigenous people as inferior in class or knowledge, my tendency was often patronizing with Chepwapisk.

Mestizaje in Mexico was created to give political power to a group after the revolution, making Indigenous people invisible. So in order to decolonize my own mind, I had to be very vigilant and mindful about my behavior and thought regarding Indigenous people. The difference between working together as equals required me to move from a colonized mind and become humble.

Knowing how to use technology, and having been trained in the use of the critical analytical mind made me feel often superior to the Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher as I could teach him, guide him and even shape his work. Even when my wishes were to be a decolonizer, I had my own agenda in the project. The long and meticulous ethical protocol I had done did not assure an ethical relationship. It only placed the university in a safe stance regarding a lawsuit, but did not protected Chepwapisk. Very soon I learned that ethical behavior is not something that can be determined by paperwork, but rather the result of a mindful observation of my thoughts, actions and words.

An equal relationship is not an easy task to establish. I also felt often Chepwapisk in control of the project and not collaborating with me. He wanted me to resolve things for him and would not fulfill what he had committed to do.

This last situation became a struggle during the project, since I was never completely sure if he was taking “time” to think in an Indigenous way, or he did
not know how to proceed and would not tell me so. For example he had thought about selling other products besides his teachings, such as drums, but he never constructed one for sale, nor created all the audios he has said he would.

I observed and realized that the way of Chepwapisk life was quite unique and difficult. On one hand he has lots of responsibility regarding the holding of teachings, doctoring and doing ceremonies and on the other hand he seemed not to have commitments or responsibilities at all.
Learning to be comfortable with complexity

The question becomes the answer

Humbleness
The Colonial Invisible Judge

One of the main goals for my project was to collaborate with a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher in the development of his presence on the Internet. One important aspect that came into play was to present his image in such a way that would give confidence to the people buying his audios. It was important that they knew they were getting teachings from a true Indigenous Medicine Man, and not from someone pretending to be Indigenous, or Spiritual Teacher. The problem of authenticity became an important issue and was not an easy one to resolve.

What would be the parameters to measure his degree of authenticity? At school and while doing theoretical research I had found a site on the Internet that talked about Wananbes. The site was a strong criticism against people who represented themselves as Indigenous without being one.

Since he was a Plains Cree man, there was no possibility of him being called a Wannabe, yet he could be called an Apple, red on the outside and white inside. I was worried that his image on the Internet could be misjudged and misunderstood. Finally knowing it would be very hard to prove authenticity unless they bought his teachings and heard him speak, we let go of that worry and focused on uploading his two last audios.

I did not imagine that when I presented the website to the academic scholar, his authenticity as a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher would be questioned so strongly. When the website was finished, I presented it to some academic scholars, which they themselves presented to others. While some of their comments were very helpful in terms of making the website more
accessible, and showed me mistakes in the navigation to improve the site, other comments became a point of reflection or discussion.

One of the comments was to include in the “about me” page his place of origin and specify to which Indigenous group he belonged. Although I already knew this was a protocol expected between Indigenous people, I had let Chepwapisk himself write this part, as I did not want to tell him how to present himself as I thought that would have been a colonizing perspective, a non-First Nation, telling one who he was and how to talk about himself.

Nevertheless, I contacted Chepwapisk and told him what my teacher had commented, waiting to hear from him how to proceed. He remained silent for a few time and then said he “had not thought about that being important”, but he had no problem and it was ok for me to include that information. His easiness in accepting the comment and his response were a teaching for me, since I had already spent hours in meditation and doing art-based responses to calm my emotions and clarify my confusion.

A second change I was asked to make to the website was to change the word “relatives” to “relations”, as the second one was the “correct” word, the one used among Indigenous people. Once again I felt uncomfortable with this comment, since the word relations, is an English word, and Indigenous people have a specific word in their language to express this important word. I knew that the use of relations or relatives could be different from the English point of view, yet being myself a non-native English speaking person; both words offer to me a similar meaning and could easily be used as synonyms. I was also aware that the philosophical meaning behind the Medicine Man’s word, was embedded
with a deep understanding of the epistemology that lies behind the act of addressing others as family or in connection with.

Therefore the comment of asking him to change the word, seemed to me once again a solidification of a meaning in a word, which might soon if not already be used without the understanding of its deepest meaning. Asking Chepwapisk to change the word, from relatives to relations, raised some questions.

I reflected about Chepwapisk’s selection of a “wrong” word for some time. I thought he might have chosen that word because he was not an academic, or because his first language was Cree and not English and he did not find too much difference between the words. As a Mexican woman, whose mother tongue is also not English the words, relatives and relations, had the same meaning and I had not even noticed which one he had used for his website.

I also reflected upon the way in which a word becomes a norm. Who decides which words are correct and which ones not? What does relative mean and what is the difference with relations? Are there relatives that are not relations, and if so why?

A third comment about the website was that we should include words in syllabics. It was interesting for me to see how syllabics, a writing language that had been taught by colonizers, was now considered Indigenous, and should be used to show authenticity.

One comment that made me feel very uncomfortable was that he should mention the type of herbs he had used to save the woman from mercury poisoning, to show his knowledge of the plants by using their names or descriptions. At this point I began to feel the “authenticity” of Chepwapisk as a
Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher was shaky and it had to be proved. I was not sure how to address this situation with him without offending him, and stayed with this uncomfortable feeling for quite a while.

Finally one day I asked him about the possibility of including the name of the herbs. He simply responded with a deep strong voice he did not want “anyone stealing his knowledge”. His answer made me think about how researchers had stolen knowledge from Indigenous people constantly and why decolonization research methodologies cautioned about allowing Indigenous people to share the knowledge they wanted and not force them. It seemed again that to fulfill academic requirements the boundaries regarding colonization had been crossed.

Another comment, one which I even felt offensive, was that he was not an authentic Medicine Man, because his hair was short, he did not use regalia and there were no links in his website to his community. Furthermore, an authentic Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher did not sell his teachings. He did not present himself in the correct way, naming his teachers, family and origin.

When I tried to explain why he did not use regalia and why he wanted to sell his teachings, I was told that different Indigenous people and very “important Indigenous scholars” had reviewed the website and had found it very upsetting. I was told also that an authentic Indigenous person would rather live with nothing than to do that. My anger elevated and was hard to control. Who had the authority to say that?

I asked myself: Would any of these Indigenous scholars do so? Furthermore, I question if academic scholars, who spend most of their time sitting in a cubicle, in front of a desk and a computer, regard their working space
as sacred? Do they feel their colleagues are their brothers and sisters? Do they work not only for their benefit and that of their family but even for the benefit of those who they consider academic enemies, or rivals? Do they consider the act of writing an article and publishing it an extension of their magic into the world?

I knew so many Indigenous people that used regalia who would use and abuse their community members, sell their land and do terrible things, that I could not believe Chepwapisk’s spirituality and knowledge would be in question based on the length of his hair. This sounded discriminatory and stereotypical.

Although I can understand that Indigenous scholars are working very hard to reverse the damage that was done by colonization, and the abuse that was inflicted to Indigenous people through research, I believe that holding on to stereotypes might be a dangerous path that can ultimately hurt more Indigenous people along the path. The Pan-Indian image is one that has been heavily contested (Jason Price PhD, in personal conversation) and one that limits the understanding of the complexities, and minimizes the richness that Indigenous lives and identities hold within.

Another comment about his website was that the word “elder” had to be capitalized, as this was the respectful way to write about Elders within Indigenous ways. Although I should have advised him about that, since I have become used to doing so at the university, I wanted to allow him to write his own self-representation, trying to act in accordance with the Ally work, and not imposing my views. Yet I understood that since the website constitutes his representation in a public space, there are some details that needed to be polished in order for him to give the best impression to the viewers.
Regarding links to other site, I was told he should have links in his website to his Nation. When I asked Chepwapisk about this, he remained silent for a long time, and then said:

I guess this would be good, but I would have to go and ask permission from the band and council for this. This can be very difficult. Not everybody likes me there you know... some are still afraid of me, because I am a Medicine Man., some think I am the devil, because I do not go to church. They destroyed my sweat lodges many times, until I decided to leave the reserve. I only go back to see my mother, but the band and people mmm... there is too much politics... do we really have to do this? Do you think this is necessary?

Because the Ally work is the work “with and not about” I supported each and everyone of Chepwapisk decisions, and not to push my own views. I encouraged him to express and represent himself, as he wanted. And I focused on being mindful about my own preconceptions, and cultural baggage so it would not influence his views.

This was not an easy practice, since I carry a heavy cultural and academic bag. Yet as it will be explained in the section regarding mindfulness practice, having a constant external observer helped me refrain from imposing my own views on him, as well as for letting go of the emotions that was aroused when I presented the work to the academic scholars.

Chepwapisk had his own views about life, and they had to be respected and honored. To work out and reflect about the troubles I found during this process, I created a poem entitled Medicine Man.
The Medicine Man

Once I heard someone asking to a good old friend,

Why don’t you have feathers, nor dance all day?

Where is your regalia and long hair?

Who taught you about plants, crystals and the ancient ways?

Are you an authentic Medicine Man?

Can you prove that to me?

Why you live in the city, and not on the reserve?

And the Medicine Man remained in silence, and then smiling continued his way.

Stop, stop shouted the man angry, when he heard no response

I guess you are not authentic, and that ‘s why you go.

And the Medicine Man, waved him good by, blessing him safe.

I knew both of them, the angry man and the saint.

From latter I got many blessings and teachings of ancient ways.

The other, the angry man, he was the best,

He helped me toughen my patience, resilience and inner strength.

And if you ask me if the Medicine Man was true or fake

I will be silent, like him as well.

Yet if you want like me to learn, all you need to do is open your heart.

Listen to his words, but mostly to his silence, because he will only show you the path.

The rest is up to you as it was for me.

Be mindful of thoughts, emotions and words.

And as you walk your path, on this beautiful earth.

Pray and look for signs, they are everywhere.
Entering the center

Circle

Void

The place of darkness

Solitude

Inner Alliance

The womb of light
**Phase 3**

Within the context of Cooperative Inquiry, Phase 3 is the time to engage in a personal reflection regarding the process (Heron, 1996). Peter Reason suggests in the website http://www.peterreason.eu/Papers/DoingCo-operativeInquiry.pdf: “allow yourself to attend to the fullness of the experience; to shyness, irritations, embarrassments, angers, delights and triumphs. Notice the subtleties of experience” (p. 230).

Although cooperative Inquiry states that phase 3 should be one of self-reflection, the modality of mindfulness was done throughout the whole process of this study, a requirement for gaining insights in autoethnography research. Yet in search of following the cooperative inquiry framework aligning myself with decolonizing theories, and due to the amount of intense emotions, resulting from the process of working in alliance and presenting the website to the academic world, I decided to dedicate some specific time to this endeavor. I also decided to use this time to go to Mexico and uncover new layers of understanding of myself as a Mestiza. I wanted to explore and understand the root of inner contradictions, feelings of shame and guilt regarding privilege, and confusion regarding race this study had surfaced.

This time would also serve to explore academic themes and questions making use of a divination process.
Going back to the roots

Revisiting the place we came from; where we spent our childhood; and the family we grew up in, under the light of mindfulness and acceptance, leads to self-transformation. To do so it is necessary to be able to process the emotions that come and to restructure the self. For a woman of color like me, this is an act of “Doing Mestizaje, and Nepantlear” Anzaldúa (1987). Opening the wound and seeing straight into it with compassion and understanding, for which narratives and art can be of incredible help. Sublimation of painful memories or difficult insights allowed me to shed the skin of the old snake and emerge with the new, *las Plumas de Quetzalcoatl.*

*Museo de Antropología*

Time had passed since I had entered the PhD program and had created the website with Chepwapisk. I was still constantly needing to explain my interest in doing my dissertation with Indigenous groups and finding ways to validate what was seen as “intrusion” with Indigenous scholars as well as white academics. Feeling alienated and terribly confused, I said one day to myself: “I am a Mestiza yet I am not really conscious of what that means”. I was raised as a white middle class girl and now I need to confront my Indigenous side and embrace the totality of my heritage. Therefore I decided to go back to Mexico City and start researching my background and understanding my culture. Remembering that every time some foreigner or tourist had come to visit me, I had encouraged her or him to visit the Museum of Anthropology, I decided to
start my personal journey visiting that museum once again, this time on a very personal mission.

As I arrived at the Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, I noticed a tension or nervousness in my stomach, as well as little shocks of energy swirling through my body. I was very nervous and exited to visit this place again, and I was aware it would be a different experience that would change me in some way.

As I came around the corner and started walking through the park to the museum I saw the huge Tláloc statue (Aztec God of Rain) standing imposing in the garden outside the museum. He was standing greeting and challenging me at the same time. I closed my eyes and for a second I imagined the hands of the people who have carved this majestic piece. I wondered about their feelings, dreams, and everyday lives. I smiled at them and walked into the museum.

The museum has twelve permanent archeological exhibitions, ten permanent Ethnographic exhibitions and two temporary exhibition halls. Each one of these halls has hundreds of pieces that vary from very small and delicate to huge monumental ones.

As I walked through the different halls I began to establish a connection with each piece. They were standing as a vivid testimony of life before the conquest showing the wisdom and knowledge that prehispanics had achieved. The precision of the work and the mastery of materials as well as the depth in the concepts was astonishing. Sadly enough it also reminded me about the ignorance with which the Spanish conquerors battled to destroy the Indigenous cultures they found and the imposition of the Catholic religion over Indigenous rituals practices and healing methods. Anger rose, yet I knew I was part of the result of all of this hardship.
As I turned around, I saw a group of school children observing “el Penacho de Cuauhtemoc”, (Cuauhtemoc's head dress). Their teacher was enthusiastically recounting Cuauhtémoc's story about his endurance resisting torture, when Spaniards burned his feet trying to make him reveal where the Aztec treasure had been hidden.

Memories of previous visits I had made with my school as a child came to me. My teachers had brought me here to this same place to recount the same heroic act of our last pre-hispanic emperor. She had also commented about the many authentic pieces that had been stolen by Europeans that have not yet been returned, and the many codices that had been destroyed by the Catholic Church or were still at the Vatican.

In school and in the home Mexican children receive, as I did, multiple contradictory ideas that are not easy to resolve. As I watched the teacher, surrounded by Mexican elementary school children, I noticed as I brought my eyes up she had dyed hair. It was dyed blonde; something not so unusual in Mexican women, yet this time it made me wonder why so many Mexican women dyed their hair blonde. I soon realized how many of my family members, friends and teachers — especially the white teachers— had always seen Indigenous people as inferior to the White, and whiteness was always a measure of beauty. And even though part of the education discourse was to make children proud of their Indigenous ancestry, the words Indigenous or Indian were pejoratives.

The people, sites and sounds in the museum made me newly mindful of the multiple contradictions in my upbringing. I sat in front of the huge carved
stone of the Aztec Calendar. As I was immersed in my thoughts I realized that I was focused on the eyes of the sun at the center of the calendar. They had a special look. They were direct and ethereal at the same time, just like time itself. It came to me that this ancient piece, even though it is more accurate than the Gregorian calendar we use today, is not used as such, but was set aside by the conquistadores. The knowledge that pre-hispanic people had about the cosmos was amazing and was completely disregarded. Their life rhythm was connected with stars, planets and its effect on the earth. How sad colonization imposed such a change in our lives. Now we measure time differently and do not perceive the same relation with the cosmos. I wonder how this disconnection with cycles and nature is affecting our behavior and health. Why nobody has questioned the study of the Mayan or Aztec calendar in school? Why we have never been instructed on traditional healing based on many years of empirical observation? Although Indigenous culture somehow survived the Spanish conquest, Indigenous worldviews became second-class knowledge.

As I walked through the multiple corridors of the museum I started to notice that even though Indigenous cosmovision had suffered changes over time, Spirituality in one way or another remained as the most important elements of daily life with specific beliefs, practices and knowledge. I could clearly see in the codices and stone statutes the relationship between humans and nature and the multilevel understanding of the universe and its ecology.

Walking through the amazing exhibitions of the Museum of Anthropology revealed to me that that when the Spaniards arrived in the Americas, they encountered indigenous civilizations with highly developed mathematical, astronomical, architectural and medical knowledge, living in harmony with
“mother earth”. And their buildings had a spiritual purpose and were constructed in relation with the cosmos. The Mexicas for example, through the use of very sophisticated technologies had built, between the first and second century AD, the city of “Teotihuacan”, as a replica of the solar system including Pluto. By around the year 250 AD the Maya had built, the pyramid of Chichenitza, in which, on the summer solstices, the sun creates a shadow that resembles the image of a snake curling down the stairs (Haramein, N. 2010).

I felt very sad to realize how ignorance and fear had prevented conquerors from appreciating and benefiting from the wisdom and knowledge of the pre-hispanic people. Their sense of superiority had made them unable to see what was in front of them. Then I realized that superiority was still part of the education system we have and which had instructed me.

All those “important dates” I had to memorize.... how dare teachers call this torture education... I was never instigated to understand history critically... As I realized how little I knew about my Indigenous heritage I felt robbed from years of education and realized I could have been playing, instead of sitting on those hard chairs “learning” lies!

Anger and frustration grew in me as I started to remember moments in my instruction. I remembered the story I was told about the Malintzi or Malinche, an Indigenous woman who fell in love with the conqueror Hernán Cortés and worked with him as a translator. My teachers told me she had been a traitor, without ever explaining that the “Malinche was one of the twenty slaves that had been given to Cortés by the native ruler of Tabasco in 1519”, she was a very well educated, intelligent, and beautiful Indigenous woman that spoke many languages. Why was she not presented ever to me as an example of
Indigenous women is power and male abuse? The machismo that prevailed in the education system was obvious. Women were supposed to sacrifice themselves even when they were objectified and given away as a token of gratitude to a conqueror.

To think about this more and to calm myself I went to sit in front of the beautiful fountain at the center of the museum. I closed my eyes and felt connected with the Maliche’s life. Her life was so similar to the one, we, Mexican women still live. El machismo still hurts. *Los conquistadores violaron a la mujer y ella aun duele de sus heridas.*

I decided to finish the visit and walked my way out of the museum. On my way out a poem came to me as a gentle breeze. It was one of Netzahualcoyotl,(coyote fasting), poem that I had learned at elementary school for a festivity.


    Nos ataviamos, nos enriquecemos  
    con flores, con cantos:  
    éas son las flores de la primavera:  
    ¡con ellas nos adornamos aquí en la tierra!

    Hasta ahora es feliz mi corazón:  
    oigo ese canto, veo una flor:  
    ¡que jamás se marchiten en la tierra!

We get dressed, we enrich ourselves with flowers and songs: these are the flowers of Spring: with them we adorn ourselves here on Earth! Now my heart is happy, I hear this song, I see a flower; May it never wither on Earth!
As I left the museum I realized the complexity and sophistication of my Indigenous heritage. I was proud of my heritage and even more interested in deepening my understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing.

*El camino espiritual – Maestros, Hierbas y Hechiceros*

It had been a week since I had been in the Museum of Anthropology of Mexico. My mind was still swirling with all the thought and reflections I had in that place. My mind was active and I had more questions about my Mexican heritage, and myself than ever before. Yet in spite of those questions pounding constantly in my mind, I had a feeling of peace deep inside. The sense of being connected with something bigger than myself was underlying my fears and doubts.

I needed to buy groceries and decided to take my mother with me to the same market I used to go when with her when I was a little girl. I had nice memories of that place and wanted to refresh them and give my mother an outing. She had been now for two years in a wheel chair after a stroke and I wanted to take her out and visit an old place that could spark the day for her. Because the relationship with the vendors offered a cozier and more human environment for her than going to a store like Wal-Mart, or the like I decided to bring her along.

As I started walking the corridors full of vendors, joyful memories flooded my mind. Not much had changed in the least forty five years. Fruit stands looked colorful and inviting and vendors call me Güerita (blondie) offering me slices of delicious fruits. I remembered being called that when I was a girl and wonder
why I never felt awkward hearing that since the color of my skin is brown. Yet now I know my middle class position, made me feel entitled to of that title, a reflection of how class and color are united in the Mexican Mestizo consciousness.

On this day, the Marchantas (vendors) were busy and the stands looked colorful with delicious products. In the back babies slept and others played enthusiastically, while their parents worked. The place looked alive with a sense of community. I thought how fortunate these children were to be able to be with their parents and how rare this is today. I was not sure if school, and day care centers were a progress or a step backwards.

My mother was happy to be once again in the Mercado and Angeles (the girl that takes care of her when I am in Canada) was delighted, as she had been one of these children when she was young. She had grown up playing at this mercado, as her mother was herself a Marchanta. Angeles's mother had had one of those stands that are almost unique to Mexico Mercados. a puesto de hierbas (herb stand). Her mother had been a hierbera, with vast knowledge about medicinal plants. As we approached what used to be her mother's stand she proudly told us her mother could prescribe and prepare special formulas for every malady.

Maybe my mother and I met Angeles here at one time in the past. Maybe Angeles carried my mom's bags when she was a girl, something children often do to earn some pesos. Maybe we had been with her or maybe we had seen her with an air of superiority, as we were middle class and she was poor. I don't know. It was interesting to be together now enjoying once again the smell of herbs, and our childhood memories. I thought for one moment how little we know about
who we really are.

Angeles guided us to her mother’s stand and started a conversation with the *hierbero* who was attending it. He remembered hearing about her mother and told her some stories about her that she did not know. It appeared that my inquiry on Indigenous worldview and the search of my Indigenous heritage was also helping Angeles know more about herself, and her mother. Realizing the interconnection we live in, I moved closer to the stand to browse through the hundreds of herbs. Their smell reminded me of soothing moments as a child drinking herbal teas or being anointed with balsams, maybe prepared by Angeles’ mother or some other Medicine woman.

As we continued our tour in the Mercado we came across another unique stand: The stand of Magic, Santeria, and cleansing. In this stand you can have card readings; buy saints; get smudged or cleansed; buy candles, eggs, soaps or any kind of artifacts to create or counteract spells.

At this stand, the Mexican religious syncretism is beautifully presented. Indigenous symbols and practices coexist side by side with Catholic prayers and saints. Examples of this, are the color votive candles sold with a Christian prayer attached to them. Each candle has a color, which is associated with a Saint. By lighting that color the energy of the Saint is called upon to act. Cleansing bouquets, eggs, incenses and copal compete for display space with the Virgin of Guadalupe who is well represented in the candle selection as well as in many other amulets along with Saint Michael.

Visiting the herb stand and standing in front of the cleansing paraphernalia helped me to recall that my childhood exposure to the rituals of the Mexican religious syncretism and the common use of herbs as medicinal first aid
remedies, which began my interest in healing, magic and spirituality.

As a teenager, when I started to ponder the questions about the meaning of life, my spiritual interest made me search for deeper meanings. I became interested in philosophy and logic, spending hours debating with friends. I started to question the Christian institutions and practices, and began the search for a different spiritual path to follow.

I hold my mother’s hand; thankful for the many teas she had given me as a child. I was happy to be with her once again, this time with a wider understanding of the beauty and complexities held within the Mexican spiritual and healing traditions.
Poems - in xochitl, in cuicatl

Engaging in writing poetry was another way in which I explored deeper meanings and emotions of my work as an Ally, and explored my mestizaje. In Nahuatl a poet is called a flower creator. So I allowed flowers to bloom from my heart with songs of pain and joy, confusion and anger, and above all of hope.

\[
\textit{in xochitl in yolotl (song of the heart)}
\]

\begin{quote}
I am a Mestiza in search of the wisdom of my Indigenous ancestors.

In the journey of spiritual growth,

I bow to my teachers and embrace the path of life,

\textit{which is the goal itself.}

Yolotl, sing your song,

So that I know my path is a good one.

May it bloom and beautify

the world with its song.

Xochitl

Yolotl

!\end{quote}
Regreso a Aztlán

Nacer es un acto sagrado que implica un periodo extenso de preparación en la acogedora obscuridad del útero. Tiempo y paciencia es todo lo que se requiere. Aun cuando parece que no sucede nada en el exterior, en el interior infinito se desarrollan miles de enlaces que darán forma al Nuevo ser.

Estoy en el proceso de gestación de mi tesis doctoral, tratando de poner en orden toda la experiencia de una vida. Me encuentro en el principio de un camino en el que el mi pasado ha venido al rencuentro con mi presente para abrir una brecha de luz y claridad a mi futuro.

La historia de mi vida se presenta como un libro en el cual se encuentran las respuestas a todas las preguntas que al no encontrar respuesta poco a poco se volvieron pesadas piedras que cargaba en mí. Ahora me siento a la orilla de un remanso de agua y empiezo a ver una a unla piedras y guijarros de mi vida. Leyendas, pensamiento, Dolores y quimeras. La vida de mi pueblo y las canciones de mi tierra.

Desde el momento en que nací flores y cantos se me han ido otorgando. Ahora me siento honrada de sostener esta energía entre mis manos. La veo brillar y humildemnte busco el lugar del retorno para iniciar el camino.

Ahora he decidido hacer el viaje de regreso a Aztlán como mis antepasados. Viajar desde el Norte hasta la ciudad donde los señores volcanes esperan pacientemente el despertar del pueblo.

Regreso a mi origen, el sol despunta sus primeros rayos. Que este trabajo abra las puertas de mi entendimiento y pueda reconocer la sabiduría de mis ancestros y que todos los seres reciban beneficio de este humilde trabajo.
We are One

Breathing in, and breathing out in stillness, I was told by an inner gentle voice that We are just One... yes, just One! - You and me; the reader and the writer; the researcher and the researched; the colonizer and the colonized; the teacher and the student, we are all one! Yet we live as strangers in this wonderful place, fighting for resources as if there were not enough for all of us and for them.... How interesting...

We fight and defend a personality based on an untruthful belief - that of separation - while we play many stupid games. One of them is land accumulation, very cruel requiring slaves. Women, children and old age people, are robbed and placed in endless debt.

How have we forgotten we belong to the land that we are floating in the universe among the stars? How silly...

We breathe air that belongs to nobody, a gift from our brother and sister plants. Yet we destroy the forests without much consciousness of how we are slowly killing the children of the future with our bare hands. How stupid...

Why if we are here on this earth for such a short time, do we spend so much of it, hurting each other and our precious land? What is that, which prevents the human species from enjoying the gift of life? Why are we prisoners of greed, and scarcity when there is more than plenty around?... Why have we become blind and closed our heart?

This crazy mind that is so brilliant, has gotten out of control. Please forgive it, forgive me, forgive you... It runs like a wild horse urged by the master, who digs to its sides the painful spurs of doubt.

The creative power has turned against itself and is ferociously devouring its own tail. It is due to that old wound that can’t easily go away. Yes the wound is deep and stubborn, and has forgotten how to close. It won’t go easily away, it might even bleed itself to death.

And if you ask me how I know this, I can only say, I wish I didn’t know, but this wound lives in inside myself. It bleeds and cries constantly like a hurt abandoned child, it sits lonely in a corner with a covered face.
I was born unknowingly tied to two strong forces that seem to endlessly pull away. They have stretched my heart blindly and made me live afraid.

I was born out of an act of war, and maybe of love and not of rape. My blood is part European, and Indigenous as well. My ancestors are the killers and the survivors that remade themselves again.

I can’t say I hate neither the conquerors nor the conquest that happened long time ago in Aztlán, since my own existence is due to that terrible act. Yet I wonder why in silence, with a cry that nobody has ever heard, condemning the terrible abuse that causes that terrible pain!

My native ancestors have endured the past and what goes on today. Living humiliation and troubles in isolated reserves. I wish things had been different... I wish they could change. Yet I know and accept we all share this blame, doing nothing while the North melts away.

How can I stop this horse of mine, and yours and his and hers as well, so we can have a minute at least of peace and joy before we are all dead?

There is not so much time left, you know... we are just an instant that is passing by, we need to move fast, if we want to create an alliance of our heart and mind.

I’ve heard there are people already working as one, I am not sure how they did it, but it seems they are accomplishing their life task. They have risen above the mud of selfishness and betrayal. They are dancing with no masks; their stallions have been tamed.

These people are called Allies, and collaborate with those being oppressed. They are healing their own minds, decolonizing themselves. I wonder if they too, just like me can hear their spirit cry in night full pain.

I want to join them and learn their loving ways! Follow their footsteps and sing together a song of change. Build bridges, cross boarders, dismantle structures, liberating all that constrain. And in rejoice paint a landscape... yes full of light and color.

Yet I have heard that the task is difficult and the novice must be ready to cultivate, one million qualities of golden purity, and above all endless strength.
I have heard also that Allies need to explore the terrain on their own that so far there is almost no training, guidance or help. I have heard it is a path where few dare to go, as in the mirror of truth is found a no-Self. Yet my spirit shouts.

The task must be done. Look deeply, be stillness, bloom as a flower, become the mountain, be the drop of dew, clear and fresh. Maybe then the Mestiza, dark and white, the bastard, the great shame, will finally be healed and I can love myself again.

And who or what will be born when the deed is done, the healing taken place? I am not sure, as my mind is still running, blind and scared. Yet sitting in silence from the depth is heard, a voice that assures me that there is no option ... it will be Us, it will be Them, it will be All.

Isn’t it wonderful?

To all my Relatives and/or Relations
Land of possibilities

Imagination

Intuition

Self-confidence

Going deeper to find the treasure

Relying only on oneself

Guidance always comes

Majestic
Consultation of the Medicine Cards regarding specific research questions

One of the questions that I sought to answer through this study was if the practice of divination could be a useful approach to incorporate in research and in Ally work. To do so I consulted the oracle “Medicine Cards” asking for some clarifications regarding specific research questions.

Because I knew that being a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher is not easy today, I became curious about the ultimate reason that the work of Chepwapisk could have at this time in history in which the world faces so much troubles, wars, crimes, etc. Hoping to find a deeper understanding of the role of a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher in and specifically Chepwapisk in the XXI Century I entered my “Inner Tipi”, el lugar sagrado de donde surgen las respuestas, I sat in meditation, prayed and opened my medicine pouch. In a state of quietud interna, I asked al Todo y al Nada, for a response that would expand my perception of the situation.

1) Regarding the life of a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher in the XXI Century, and specifically the life of Chepwapisk what is the most important aspect for me to reflect upon?

The card that came out was Swan not to resist self-transformation

2) What is the biggest challenge in the transmission of Indigenous Spirituality online?

The cards that came out were Frog fragility; Snake transmutation; and Skunk reputation appeared with their teaching.

3) What do I have to learn from this research as a Mestiza woman?
The cards that came out were *Wild Boar* confrontation and *Buffalo* brought the White Buffalo Calf Woman story to guide me.

During the process of divination, the animals allowed me to reflect on the questions at a deeper level and through different lenses. Each Medicine offered me a unique teaching. The complete reading and insights are presented in Chapter Five.
Having crossed

Coming to light

Outcomes

The Mestiza looks back

Time to see where is standing
Phase 4

The fourth phase of cooperative inquiry was the one in which the original proposition was observed under the new light that had come from the experience. Now that the website was completed and uploaded we got together again to discuss if we had accomplished our goals. Very soon we realized that more audios were needed and I invited Chepwapisk to focus on recording more teachings.

For some time he tried different teachings, but was never satisfied with the result. Finally he created two, which we both believed were good and interesting. These were: “Purpose in Life” and “Fasting”.

Then we talked and reviewed the possibility or not selling other products beside audios. Chepwapisk had considered selling drums at the beginning of the collaborative process and this had been included in the store items. Yet he had not found time to work on them and decided to remove them from the site. We both agreed that it would be better if he concentrated his time and efforts in creating more audios and make the website a teaching site and not a selling Indigenous artifacts that would confuse the public.

At the time of writing this dissertation the site has sold 3 audios, and we are looking for ways to have more exposure. One idea Chepwapisk had was to link his site to other Spiritual Teachers, yet this has to be done with caution, since Chepwapisk’s does not want to associate his work with that of people he does not know. Therefore it might be something to do in the future, if at all.
Going inside

A message from the past to the future
The change
A potential
The Vision
The process
The outcome
CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

My autoethnography looked to provide a personal account of a Mestiza Buddhist woman engaging in alliance with a Plains Cree Medicine Man. The purpose of the collaborative work, was the creation of a website in which Chepwapisk could transmit his spiritual teachings through audiotapes hoping to better his income. As a result of our conjoined efforts, we were able to create and upload the website “www.teachingsofamedicine man.com” in which three audiotapes are now available for sale.

The study offered me the possibility of experiencing the role of Ally and have a direct understanding of the challenges, and opportunities that this relationship can offer. I was also able to address some of the gaps in literature regarding training and preparation to become an Ally and explore possible methods to resolve this gap. The study looked to address four main research questions: 1) What is for a Mestiza to be an Ally? 2) What benefit can the concept of selflessness bring to the Ally work? 3) What benefits can mindfulness practices; divination; prayers; dreams; and art-based reflections bring to Ally work? 4) What new learning and understandings can an alliance of a Mestiza with a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher bring to colonizing/decolonizing and Ally theory?

General Findings

The experience of being an Ally with a Plains Cree Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher supports much of what Ally literature presents. Yet it also
challenges some of the assumptions of what it is to be an Ally by introducing a Mestizo perspective and presenting a Medicine Man’s views on colonization and development of belief systems.

As predicted by the literature, my experience showed the need for developing and embodying specific values, skills, knowledge, and behaviors in order to establish a long-term relationship with Chepwapisk. It also showed my worldviews had a direct impact on my Ally work.

My experience concurs with Brophey’s (2011) findings regarding Allies’ motivations to engage in relationships to help others “follow their own path...[to] decolonize themselves so that self-determination can be achieved” (p. 91). My experience also presents the conflicts that exist when self-determination or self-representation of an Indigenous person is not in accordance with what other Indigenous people or groups believe should be. It also shows how a Medicine People stereotype exists among Indigenous scholars, which will be further explained in this chapter.

Regarding self-decolonization and the different qualities that Allies need to present (Bishop, 1994, Margaret, 2012), my study supports as well the developmental stages by which Allies go through (Edward, 2006, Broido, 2005). Through my experience I found that it is also very important to establish clear paths and methods that can help Allies develop desired qualities, address emotional disturbance and prevent burnt out, or failure.

Because no other study had explored Allyhood from a Buddhist perspective the findings of this study provide a baseline for understanding the importance of incorporating the concept of selflessness in colonizing/decolonizing, and Ally theory.
Transformation

Alchemy

Crossing borders
Findings that give answer to the research questions

1) How does a Mestiza experience Allyhood?

Self-reflection can be stressful.

As a Mestiza this included on the one hand, exploring my cultural roots and touching the pain of being part of a “breed” resulting from rape, abuse, war and destruction. It encompassed confronting pain and trauma of the conquest and the trauma and hurt that colonization brought to my ancestors. On the other hand, it involved seeing privileges and sense of superiority that I inherited from my Europeans ancestors. It too included confronting inner struggles searching to find myself, to then, through a mindfulness practice, work to dissolve my identity into selflessness. Being an Ally is to be in contact with self-confrontation, and experience the pain, and struggle of others, which can be at times a burden too heavy to handle.

Allyhood requires development of special qualities, attitudes, beliefs and values.

Through this project, I confirmed, Allies need to develop special qualities, skills, values and knowledge in order to engage in successful long-term alliances. I also learned these qualities need to be taught, nurtured and developed prior to engaging in alliance, because alliances and relationships constitute a self-mirror and they will inevitably bring out personal emotions. Therefore a previous preparation can allow the Ally have a meaningful experience and a personal and spiritual growth.
An Ally's day-to-day life plays an important role in quality and sustainability of alliances. 

My experience also showed beliefs and habits play an important role in developing and sustaining alliances, as well as day-to-day life. Chepwapisk and the alliance became part of my life and this had to be juggled with the many other aspect that demanded time and effort. Ally literature has not considered this important weight that Ally's personal life can exercise on the work done. Allyhood has mainly been presented as an academic endeavors. It does not address the struggles and emotional strain that balancing Allyhood with family and everyday life brings.

Allies are exposed to vicarious trauma, as they hear stories, witness and/or participate with those in alliance with. 

The collaborative relationship that I established with Chepwapisk, allowed me to have a direct experience of the pain that colonization has created for Indigenous people. Through the tone of his voice, his gestures, silences and words, I was able to perceive Chepwapisk's pain when talking about his childhood and remembering the abuse that he was subject of as a consequence of being placed in foster care. This was also true when he spoke about the effect residential schools had on his mother, and when he spoke about his grandfather and great grandfather not being able to practice openly traditional ceremonies and teach him in the traditional way.
Mestizo people have a different understanding of colonization/decolonization and therefore about alliances than White Allies.

As a Mestiza, I was inclined to create bridges of understanding between White and Indigenous people, and to look for ways in which reconciliation can be possible. Accepting and honoring my Indigenous background placed me in a position of closer relationship with Chepwapisk exploring cultural similarities. It also allowed me to experience Chepwapisk practices and teachings not as foreigner, but as part of my ancestral history.

Being an Ally with Chepwapisk brought me back memories of my childhood, when my mother alleviated my discomforts and sickness with traditional ways and herbs. Going to the Mercado made me aware of the many Medicine People that still today exist in Mexico, and the important role they play in the culture. I was able to witness how these Medicine People consult many clients on a daily basis, taking care of the health of many Mexicans, just as Chepwapisk does.

Establishing an alliance with a Plains Cree Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher helped me realize that while Mexican *hierberos y curanderos*, can have a stand in a Mercado and charge for their services, Chepwapisk still gets blankets for his services. It also brought to my attention that Mexican *hierberos* and *curanderos* do not have welfare and therefore are expected to make a living, while Chepwapisk on the other hand some Indigenous scholars expect him to leave out of welfare or government money, in order not to make his teachings a commodification.
Allyhood offers a unique opportunity for Doing Mestizaje

In regards to my emotions, by Doing Mestizaje as part of this study I was able to re-examine painful inner struggles and perceive in a different way my culture and the process of colonization and decolonization. It offered me the opportunity to see through different lens structures of oppression and reflect in the need of reinterpreting history.

A critical Indigenous view was developed

Being an Indigenous person myself allowed me to see with a critical eye some of the actions that Indigenous people are taken in regards to participating in the structures of oppression. I was also able to see how community members and band councils do not always see for the welfare of the community members, and understand why some Indigenous people have decide to leave the community looking for peace and freedom that can't be found in the community. Although the destruction of sweat lodges and aggression to Medicine People this acts are no longer accepted in Cheepwapiks’ community, destruction and prohibition of Indigenous practices supported by Band and Council still take place nowadays, like in the recent case of Oujé-Bougoumou, Quebec.

2) How can the embracement of the concept of selflessness influence Ally work?

Understanding decolonization from a Western perspective of selfhood prevents the possibility of analyzing the complexities and dynamics that sustain the structures of oppression. It does not allow the oppressed to
take responsibility in the participation of the dynamic, and become empowered in the process of self-transformation. Furthermore it does not invite the exploration of the ultimate causes and circumstances that created colonization, making the Ally work a difficult endeavor. When Allyhood is seen through a selflessness lenses, where others are one, “their” problems become personal and the solutions include thinking about all beings.

Selflessness is also a reminder of impermanence, which puts in perspective the problems we live and the pain we cause others. In this study selflessness also became an important element at moments in which my personal life absorbed my time and energy and Ally work seemed distant. Remembering that my work was not only with Chepwapisk but with the whole cosmos, and that my problems were everybody's problems, brought a sense of balance, restoring my social responsibility and enthusiasm for the work. Adopting a selflessness view helped develop the flexibility required for this experience.

Ego and altruism

Bishop (1994), expressed the need for Allies to move beyond the ego. My experience in this study showed that adopting selflessness, facilitates dissolving the Ego and embracing interdependency and altruism. Selflessness also helped embrace my Mestizo background and walk through the different stages from self-interest to altruism proposed by Edward (2006).
Understanding that mind constructs are not intrinsic to the object, but instead are attributed by my mind, and are filtered by my perception, allowed me to navigate between a complex web of interrelated causes and conditions, undertaking the Ally work and to give deeper meaning to my work. It also helped me develop social responsibility and accountability for actions.

Social responsibility

The concept of selflessness also helped me sustain awareness of implications and consequences of my thought, words and actions.

Deeper understanding of Indigenous research and paradigms

Selflessness also allowed me to related and have a deeper understanding of the work of scholars such as Battiste (1998, 2000, 2009); Baskin (2005); Cajete (1994) and Duran (2006) among others, who emphasized interconnectedness as an important aspect of Indigenous epistemologies. Selflessness also allowed me to have a better and deeper understanding of Chepwapisk’s Seven directions teaching, in which he states we need to let go of thoughts, emotions and beliefs through stillness to become one with Spirit.

Dismantling colonial structures and views

When we consider Allyhood, as a work in which one individual works with other or groups, to support “them” in their struggle, it implies separateness between the other and I, between my life and their life, between my needs and their needs. This view is one aligned with Western
dualism in which colonialism and oppression stand on. Seeing colonization through a selflessness lens allowed compassion toward oppressors to arise, understanding the confusion that a sense of separateness brings. It also offered me the possibility of observing how colonizing behaviors, as well as many decolonizing approaches spring from a dualistic view, and was able to see the pain that this bring. Furthermore it allowed me to realization that everyone and everything is my “Relation”.

Self-representation and othering

Through my alliance with Chepwapisk, I realized “othering” is the result of a dualistic view, and becomes a hindrance when looking to allow someone represent him/herself. Having been raised and educated within institutions that reinforce dualism it take much awareness and self-determination to break this view. In my relationship with him, I constantly had to refrain myself from wanting to impose my beliefs, my ways and my rhythm. Selflessness became a way to let go of fix ideas and to allow myself transform with the experience, as he exercised his right of self-representation.

Opening the heart

One day I was told the distance between the mind and heart is very short, but one very difficult to travel. In this research selflessness became an invitation to see Allyhood as a way to get from the mind to the heart.

Through a selflessness view, Allyhood became a practice not ruled by rigid
outlines or ideas, but as a practice of love and care. Selflessness also allowed me to observe how the utilitarian approach that prevails now a day, and holds together the structures of oppression, is based on the Cartesian conception of self, that places mind over emotion.

Practicing Mindfulness and the Six Paramitas has transformed the way I perceive the world. Although I cannot claim any realization, it has nevertheless made my mind more aware of my participation in sustaining oppression, discrimination, and has become a shield against the rage that some social injustice brings to me. Instead I have slowly learned to be more compassionate with myself, as well as with others and to look for a non-violent way to resolve conflicts.

Furthermore, Mindfulness practice allowed me to see the ally work and the decolonizing process from a specific angle and I believed has helped me develop great friendships with the many Indigenous people I have worked with and especially with the Medicine Man Chepwapisk. Understanding the Ally work as a bodhisattva’s work, brings a sense of humbleness, compassion and wisdom to the ally work and the resources to use when confronted with difficulties along the path.
3) **What benefits can mindfulness practices; divination; prayers; dreams; and art-based reflections bring to Ally work?**

**Dreams**

Decolonizing as a grief process.

Being in the gap between sleeping and waking up, I realized decolonization could be studied through Kubler-Ross (1969) grief work, which helped me understand the presence of anger, and depression so prevalent among Indigenous communities. It allowed me to notice elements of bargaining in decolonizing discourses, and look for strategies that could support acceptance and forgiveness to present in my work with Indigenous people.

Paying attention to dreams launched me to explore decolonization within James & Friedman (2009) grief recovery approach, and to develop an art-based workshop aiming to ameliorate the grief and trauma of Indigenous people in Canada. The insight and images that came to me as I was waking up allowed me to design a workshop to address residential school trauma in which participants could identify social and political short-term relievers and find ways to complete the process. A vision of the possibilities, freedom and benefits that completing the grieving process could bring to Indigenous, Mestizos and White people presented to me vivid and clear. With this in mind I designed the program and have already done five workshop, with very good feedback. Resulting form this experience I have come to understand the Ally as a companion in the grieving process.
**Meditation**

Three main practices were explored as possible contributions to the ally work. They were formal and informal mindfulness practice and prayer. Through them I was able to:

**Confront emotional problems**

Within the alliance relationship, meditation showed to be of great benefit for sustaining the Ally relationship. It also helped me confront and resolve many emotional problems arising during this process and as a result of the complexities of doing Ally work within an academic frame. Mindfulness was a great help to address emotions such as anxiety, frustration and confusion throughout the study. This practice was mostly important to deal with emotions created through interaction and academic exchange with university scholars; and when exploring and embracing my own cultural roots and mestizaje.

Mindfulness practice allowed me to confront self-criticism resulting from comparing my actions with the list of requirements that Ally literature demands. It also helped me address the inner conflicts resulting from having opposing inner voices fighting against each other, mostly as a consequence of being exposed to opposing ideas between my ally work and academic demands.

**Grounding self and supporting selflessness view**

Mindfulness showed to be a good practice to ground myself when needed, and to sustain my awareness of the importance of being in the present
moment connected with everything that exists. It also proved to keep alive in me the vision of my work benefiting future generations through the intricate web of interdependence.

Mindfulness practice also allowed me to get a glimpse of what Buddhism calls *Anatta* or selflessness.

**Development of Ally qualities**

The informal mindfulness practice showed to support the development of empathic attention, and deep listening. Through this practice I was able to move from a state of “doing” to a state of “being”, (Hicks, F and Bien, T., 2008) benefiting the Ally relationship. It also helped me stayed for longer periods of time in the present moment throughout the conversations with Chepwapisk and during his teachings. It reduced the constant flow of thoughts, feelings or external stimuli that normally distracts me. The practice of mindfulness also allowed me to withhold my judgment, helping me work with what was present at a given time.

In accordance with literature, it allowed me to shift my perspectives and witness my inner story, rather than being entangled by it. It also allowed me to observe my own thoughts without getting trapped by them and be compassionate and loving toward Chepwapisk and myself.

In addition Mindfulness showed to help me be cautious about assumptions, be more receptive, and be open to not-knowing. It helped me be comfortable with Chepwapisk taking the leadership role regarding his needs and desires, without me trying to constantly know what was best for him.
Mindfulness allowed me to bring love, compassion, joy and equanimity into the Ally relationship, improve the alliances, change perceptions, withhold judgment, develop a self-care practice.

Ally preparation

My experience in this study showed Ally work requires qualities that need to be ready and hopefully mature enough prior to engagement in alliance. Mindfulness requires training and practice and my previous experience with this practice allowed me to use it. It would have been almost impossible for me to use mindfulness practice without a previous training.

Prayers

Prayer, chanting and singing, brought lightness to my work rekindling hope whenever it diminished. In addition it helped me bring a Spiritual component to my work, something that Baskin (2005) states as very important in Ally work with Indigenous populations.

Praying allowed me release emotional stress and experience inner peace. The Morning Prayer became a ritual to refresh my commitment to see confusions as possible source of understanding and development of wisdom. The Evening prayer, allowed me to develop humbleness and an altruist aspiration.

Divination – Medicine Cards

Accessing unconscious
It allowed me to uncover knowing that resided in my unconscious and was either negated or inaccessible by my analytic mind. It allowed me to receive information by visual means and experience a transformational effect interpreting images, and symbols and reflecting on the text that accompanied the Medicine Card deck.

Presenting new perspectives on research areas.

The Animal Cards oracle as research tools showed to be very useful illuminating an important aspect of the overall of the problem, and giving a unique view. Following will present finding that resulted from this readings.

1) Regarding the life of a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher in the XXI Century, and specifically the life of Chepwapisk what is the most important aspect for me to reflect upon?

Swan a symbol of transformation allowed me to notice I had been focusing mostly on Chepwapisk's teachings, his learned strategies and the way he had developed his skills, without paying attention or acknowledging his feelings. I also realized I had too neglected my feelings concentrating on resolving technical problems with the website or addressing academic
responsibilities. I had disregarded the transformation that Chepwapisk and me were experiencing through the alliance.

Once this information became available, I was able to notice Chepwapisk’s good heart, and his joy for life, and was able to notice hope, resilience and transformation embodied in him. I was able to recognize that not many children, having gone through his childhood experiences would have had the strength and focus to become a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher.

2) *What is the biggest challenge in the transmission of Indigenous Spirituality online?*

To answer this question three cards were selected.

*Frog* the cleaner and most fragile creature of the pond reminded me that transmission of Indigenous Epistemologies in Canada had been damaged through Residential School. Many Indigenous people had been converted to other religions such as the Anglican or Catholic. Few people had preserved the traditional ceremonies and those who had learned them had today the responsibility of their transmission in a world that was very different from the one in which they had been developed. This situation metaphorically speaking had endangered the pond. Therefore, even though transmitting the
teachings through the Internet was a way of comodifying Spiritual teachings, it was also a way of making them accessible to others.

Snake words allow me to reflect on the beliefs and habit I had been forced to shed during my graduate program and through my work with Chepwapisk. It also brought to my attention that Doing Mestizaje required removing old skin to grow and enter new territories.

It also made me aware of encountering rigid minded people that would not be able to understand my work and Chepwapisk’s ways of being, healing nor his teachings. I thought, “many restrictions must exist when having a tight old skin”. Snake image confronted me with my work, and responsibility as educator. It also made me reflect in the role that art education can play in developing a flexible easy to shed skin or heavy armors to carry through life.

Skunk, the reputation reminded me of the difficult task that is to walk the talk. Self-respect is the best spray against enemies. The Dalai Lama is
the best example of that. The congruency between his words and actions has been his best defense against his enemies. Skunk made me aware of the importance of doing a proper representation of Chepwapisk and his teachings and how this would develop a good reputation for him.

3) What do I have to learn form this research as a Mestiza woman?

Although this question was going to be answer with one card, two cards stuck together came out. Understanding there are no coincidence but rather co-incidence, concluded there were two answers for my question. The two cards were the Wild Boar, the Confrontation, and Buffalo, Prayer and Abundance. Wild Boar, confrontation, made me aware of how Doing Mestizaje had placed me in confrontation with beliefs and structures. As a Mestiza, I had confronted ideas regarding colonization and decolonization searching to create bridges of understanding. It reminded me of the strength that required to transgress trespass and cross borders and also to live liminal spaces. Wild Boar medicine helped me appreciate inner qualities such as inner strength, altruism and persistence to achieve goals.
Buffalo brought the medicine of prayer and abundance, and with it, allowed me realize I had forgotten to acknowledge the positive. Focusing in problems prevents gratefulness and Spirit cannot be honored. This research had offered the possibility of reconciling different views and this constituted a gift from Spirit. Furthermore, acknowledging the richness of my two heritages constituted a way of transcending them, moving closer to the understanding and experience of selflessness.

4) What new learning and understandings can an alliance between a Mestiza and a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher bring to colonizing/decolonizing and Ally theory?

a) A lived testimony of the effects that residential school and colonization had on Indigenous people and communities.

Chepwapisk's audio on becoming a Medicine Man is a vivid testimony of how residential school and colonization affected his life. It shows how traditional teachings and practices were transformed with colonization and the vicissitudes that people who wanted to learn them or were born to embody them had to go through. The life and story of Chepwapisk is also an example of the courage, resilience and power that Indigenous people have developed and used to fight for their rights and specifically for the right of self-representation.
His personal story also presents the way in which Elders responded to and recognized Medicine people from a very young age. Having been born in the Cree Nation of Nisichawashik, Manitoba as the 5th child of an Indigenous family of twelve, since a very young age Elders in the community treated him in a special way. As a sign of recognition of certain kind of disposition to spirituality and or healing, Elders made money offering to him.

Colonization changed traditional ways of transmitting knowledge and develop skill among Medicine People

This alliance also allowed me to learn that Traditional ways of training and instruction of a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher are very specific and many of them were lost due to colonization. I got to know that although his mother, grandfather and great grandfather were all Medicine People, he was never instructed to become one. This was done for two main reasons: during the time, when his great grandfather and great-grandfather had been Medicine People, the law that prohibited them for practicing traditional ceremonies and healings, and second, because part of the development of becoming a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher requires that the person undergo a process of self confrontation and self-discovery of capabilities. Furthermore, it is only at certain moments in life when a Medicine Man can transfer powers, or something like that to another Medicine Man. Yet growing among people who knew about plants helped him get some basic understanding of the use of barks, herbs and ointments for healing.
Intuition is an inner capacity that can be developed

Another important aspect that this relationship taught me was that Intuition is an important skill that a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher develops from a very young age. Through the autobiographical story of Chepwapisk I learned that at the beginning of his life, and as he slowly started to realized his capabilities as a healer, intuition played an important role. Even from a very young age, he relied on an inner wisdom or knowledge to select plants and the way to prepare for healing. At age 10 for example, when he performed his first healing to one of his puppies, he did it without guidance, or supervision, purely based on his own intuition. As a young man, he continued relaying with absolute confidence on his intuition to perform his healing, even when by this time the beneficiaries of his work would not be puppies, but very sick human beings.

Being a Teacher convey huge responsibility furthermore being a Spiritual one

Furthermore, this alliance allowed me to understand that becoming a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher conveys big responsibilities and it took many years for Chepwapisk to embrace the duties. It also showed me that even though being a Medicine Man can look very appealing to many, as it can bring recognition and a sense of power, it also comes with big responsibility that can be very difficult to embrace. At the beginning of his journey Chepwapisk although feeling compassion for the pain of others, felt overwhelm by it and tried to keep his abilities unknown to his community. Later on when he accepted the responsibilities that come being a Medicine Man, he had to fight his ego as a healer and develop humility.
A Spiritual teacher needs to be knowledgeable on the concept and experience of suffering, its causes and strategies to transform it.

Working with Chepwapisk allowed me to learn that a Medicine Man’s understands human suffering is similar in many ways way to that of a psychologist and/or a holistic physician. Furthermore, that although becoming a Medicine Man, requires basically the development of knowledge regarding plants and its uses, becoming one which is also a Spiritual Teacher requires also being able to reflect on and understand human suffering and its causes. Doing this can allow the Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher a more precise prescriptions of herbs and plants, as the healer can get to the root of the problem causing the imbalance and sickness. Understanding the causes of human suffering allows the healer help the client with emotional issues, acting similar to a therapist, knowledgeable of the dynamics of the mind.

**Tradition also requires changing, transforming and evolving**

Collaborating with a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher permitted me to see that a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher is knowledgeable many Traditional Ways of healing, and to understand that as Chepwapisk developed his healing capacities, he began to incorporate new sources for diagnosis and multiple forms of treatment. He changed from using only herbs as medicine to dream on peoples problems and their treatment; use hand energy for healing; sing healing song and perform ceremonies such a sweat lodges; and make use of crystals to see the problems and expanded his ways of treating clients.
Stillness is a fundamental practice of Indigenous Spirituality and one that should be explored within education settings.

Working with Chepwapisk gave me the opportunity of better understanding the practice of Stillness, and how this constitutes the door for self-understanding and inner peace. This can is very important for Ally work. It also taught me that as time passed by and he became more experienced as a Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher, he experienced the fruits of practicing meditation, which he called stillness. Being able to spend long hours in silence and quiet mind, he was able to have a direct experience of the benefits that this practice can have in the healing process. And he came to understand that stillness brings inner peace.

It is important to learn how to find answers from within and not be always dependent on others.

He also recognizes that this kind of practice is not one that can be easily done, and that most people will have many obstacles that will prevent them from engaging, carrying of bringing into fruition this practice of stillness. Yet he constantly insists in his teachings that only within the self, the answers to our needs and the true nature of self can be found.

Working and being together with the Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher offered me the unique opportunity of witnessing how Indigenous Spirituality respects diversity and teaches humbleness. I was able to see Chepwapisk’s approach is one of acceptance of diversity of views and humbleness.

As an Ally I was able to experience the commonalities that Indigenous
people and Mestizo people have regarding ceremonies, protocols and beliefs. It also helped me see the differences and uniqueness each one presents and honor them.
CHAPTER SIX: ART-BASED REFLECTIONS

The essence of my Story

Stories have no ending; we just pretend they have, so this is not the end of my story, but just the removal of one more layer, the layer that uncovers what is to be an Ally. Being myself an artist, art educator and art therapist, I decided to engage in a process of art making to explore the essence of this journey. Art making allowed me to express the unknown, the painful, and the contradictions that I found exist in myself and around me.

It also gave me the opportunity to express and dialogue with myself in a different way and to explore culture, dreams, and worries through colors, shapes, textures, and forms.

The art pieces I present here are not meant to be an explanation, but rather a way of sharing important moments of my experience in this study. The description I make of them as well as the resulting poem are an invitation to share with me a sacred moment, and enter the space in which the artwork was done. The images are not meant to be interpreted. Any interpretation is a projection of the viewer's inner world, and not my view, experience or understandings.

These images are a way of sharing my experience and the essence of the Story.
What do you see?

I see myself reclaiming my heritage, Connecting with earth and coming out of the fire of colonization, abuse, shame, confusion, doubt, discrimination, and prejudice. I see the mountains that stand far away, and the road that is leading me to them. I see the clouds present as a reminder of the imperfection of the moment, yet the sky is clear and I can see and enjoy the stars.

I am floating, and I am not sure if I am or not grounded. Maybe I need to
check that out. The fire is my own flesh and it is what fuels me. My passion, yes my passion.

I am alone, yet being one with the whole; It is a moment of connection and spirituality.

I am calling out or shouting, maybe both. Calling for what is mine and shouting who I am.

The boulders are grey; they look nice, and make the landscape more diverse. This reminds me of the importance of accepting diversity.

The mountains are high; they are witnessing what I am doing and what is going on in this place. The mountains are the teachers, that are attentive to what is being said, or done. But this are not regular teachers, these are wise beings that through experience and humbleness can rise with such a majestic pose.

The moon is crescent, not yet full, which means this is only the beginning of my journey and it is still far from being complete.

The stars are there to remind me I come from them and be humble.

The whole picture is centered. I wonder if that mean If this process of reclaiming my heritage has been too intense for me as I have been focusing on myself and my process very much. My dress is so bright, red, which is action, passion, heart, and blood. The long braided hair, is adorning my back and spine, like a serpent, the kundalini.
Mestizos are neither Indigenous nor White.

Both sides discriminate against us. It takes time,

and a lot of reflection to come to terms with this identity.

It is painful and difficult to reconcile the opposing forces that live inside us.

Yet once it is possible to embrace who we are,

we can rise from the flames of shame

and sing our song to the moon again
What do you see?

I see myself floating, hanging from the white string. Everything looks chaotic, although it seems to have a certain order. The red pattern at the bottom was not completed, it is broken. The top is dark, where Hecho en Mexico stands, darkness around Mexican creations? Not sure where to go, or how to go. I am just floating with no clear arms, only a big head and a body like a ghost. My mouth is open, kind of shouting. The Mexican flag colors are in the middle, not very clear, but present. Under it is jute, green grass, Indigenous. The bottom is adorned with braided strings with knots.
Doing mestizaje is complex and painful.

At moments it is difficult to say where we are or who we are.

We cross borders and leave in between spaces.

Sometimes floating like ghosts... shouting, helpless without hands.

We carry our Indigenous heritage in the heart,

we know it is there, but is has knots...

and don’t know how to untie the string.
What do you see?

I see roots in the shape of a circle with an Ojo de Dios (Huichol name for this symbol) in the center of it. The center is pulling me in. The branches are like a funnel that constitutes the entrance to the center of the roots.

The entrance is calling me to go in. It makes me feel at home and is very inviting. I feel it is very organic and alive. It feels like going back home.

I see the entrance is very adorned with soft strips of yarn.
It could be a nest, but I see it as a portal to a new dimension.

\[ \text{I am my roots. They are pulling me in to be adorned in feathers} \]

\[ \text{What I leant at a very young age, shapes who I am now. What is that?} \]

\[ \text{Going back and revisiting home, is going to make peace with culture, family and self.} \]

\[ \text{Is entering the 'Ojo de Dios', and be one with it.} \]
What do you see?

I see smog contaminating the sky in the First Nation. It looks so pretty, and yet is so bad. The sun is shining but the sky will get grey very soon. The earth has no green, it is arid, just sand, sterile. No trees, no animals, just industry and the byproducts of it. I saw this image and had to take a picture. I am so sad. This is not going on against Indigenous will. They own the land, they get profit. They have millions. They are a very rich First Nation. They stand on top of oil sands, how terrible and how much we need to do to change this.
Father sky, what are we doing?
Can you ever forgive our ignorance?

We have already raped our mother, and we are now destroying you.

This is not being done by White, it is done by us, yes all of us.

Everybody has learned these crazy ways and now we enjoy them.

What a pity, very little to be proud of.
What do you see?

This boy is standing on a stool in order to see the TV. He is in charge of selling DVDs but he got distracted. As a boy he wants to play. He is not aware of what is going on around him. He is just a boy, but has been put to work. He does not even have a proper stand, he works on the street in an improvised place. The DVDs are illegal copies, that is why he has a TV. He needs to prove they work to his clients. What is he watching? Which are his
dreams? He is not at school, who knows what he will do tomorrow.

Colonization left a mark in Mexico... You are still so small, but you manage your life.

I have seen you many times and in many places,
always managing in some way your life.

I saw you when I was a girl and now I see you again.

What is life for you?
Are you happy?

Do you have dreams to follow?

Illegal DVDs, they are so good and cheap.

We all contribute in one way or another to this.

Hopes and dreams, my little boy, enjoy your time of ignorant happiness.

I wish you could be doing something else,

learning, laughing... yet you are there
What do you see?

I see two very contrasting images. Three opposing icons together. Antlers, a symbol of Indigenous traditional ways of living and a Catholic church in the background. And in between the mark of development, satellite dish. The White church is painted although the tower needs a little bit of blue. The house has not been paint, and looks rustic. Colonizer and colonized. The church shows its triumph. And technology stick out of the house, looking
for the signals coming from outer space.

White and tall stand your tower,

contrasting with the blue sky and the unpainted house.

What a triumph!

The government is blamed but not you who hurt so much.

And in between all,

a TV antenna,

the technological opium now standing in the North.

The conquest and colonization accomplished their goal.

En el nombre del Padre,

nos matamos unos a otros.
What do you see?

I see a juxtaposition between a man in a glass and the Mexican flag. The man is praying, maybe for a job or to find a solution for the many problems that are happening in Mexico. The Flag is a symbol, yet it is only a piece of fabric. The true Mexican life resides in its people and we are all in trouble. So much violence, injustice, we are just praying for a miracle that will end this. The government has lost control long ago. Mexico has become a...
reflection I the glass. And the snake has lost its head, you cannot see it.

Folding hands and praying is all its left. We are disappearing and becoming a reflection. We are gone.

Once upon a time, I was happy leaving in my country,
I had to go, and I wish I could go back to my land
The government lost its capacity of taking care of me and protecting the ones I love
I had to go, please let me come back
Mexicanos, Masiosare el exaño enemigo vive en casa
The joy has gone and it has become only a reflection
The government lost its head, we all lost it
I had to go... just could not stand it anymore.
What do you see?

I see a warrior, standing and carrying her child. Her face looks gentle with the little mouth yet her core is strong. It represents myself, walking the path of allyhood. I am carrying with me the future generations, and together we are in a journey.

The branch I hold in my right hand is my strength. I am adorned with four beads in my breasts, which protect my female side. My hair is adorned with
a conch shell, which represents the ocean and all the creatures that have been in earth before human. I am wearing pants and a skirt, which stand for doing and working both in the masculine and feminine roles.

My hair and that of my child are purple and blue, which remind me of the ocean seaweeds. It also makes me think about the process of transmutation, alchemy, and change.

She is walking her path. The path also reminds me of motherhood. How I used to work, and do all the household duties while taking care of my children, sometimes not sleeping when they were sick.

I wonder also about the child I have in my arms. It is a girl. Two generations. She is not a baby and can walk on her own, yet still needs to carried and supported sometimes. I see myself as an Ally, a mother and a warrior. I see my mother taking care of me. And the branch, an endless road with many curves, is the intricate journey.

To be an ally is to be a warrior.
To push the walls of differences.
To confront oneself, and to reflect.
To know I am not perfect and be my own friend
I carry my daughters with me
Those I have not yet met
But they support me, and I hold them
Motherhood
Something to bring along always,
not forget where I am going,
Alchemy and change
Intricate journey
Abuela

What do you see?

I see my ancestral grandmother staring at me with kind eyes and a gentle face. She is curious about me just as I am curious about her. She wonders and I wonder.

Like a mirror we see each other and we see ourselves as well. She is silent, and a little bit sad. Maybe also tired. She is lacking something. The joy in her eyes is not very big.

She is so fixed and pretty, yet she wonders, and makes me wonder about what was lost, what is she missing, what did she see, and what is she here trying to tell me.

Her long hair is not yet white, she is not that old, yet she has many
wrinkles. Time and hard times had left a mark in her face. Her life has not been easy.

I look at the middle line in her hair. It looks like dividing a world in two.

And her braids two waterfalls adorned with flowers falling down through an intricate path.

I do not see where the braids end or if they end at all.

I feel love and respect toward this image.

I can't stop looking at her eyes, the door to her soul… to my soul, curious, inviting and yet silent.

I can see you Abuela querida,

Although I really never knew you well

But somehow I believe that

You can see me Abuela, you can see me

Because you live in me, you are Me
CHAPTER SEVEN: LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning outcomes for the Ally

Through this research I found Allyhood is a complex work that involves emotional stress. It required confronting my participation in structures of oppression creating strong emotions such as: impotence, anger, frustration, guilt, sadness, impatience, and confusion. Engaging in Allyhood also forced me to explore and experience a rupture in my belief systems. This epistemological rupture was accompanied with feelings of hopelessness, fear and internal fragmentation, for which I found no support structures within academia. Yet the qualitative modalities explored in this research showed to be good tools to address emotional distress resulting from engaging in alliances. My experience confirmed it is necessary to establish and train Allies in practices that will allow them to take care of themselves and experience Allyhood in a healthy and productive way.

Allyhood as ceremony; practicing mindfulness; connecting with Spirit through prayer; exploring the unconscious through divination; paying attention to dreams; and doing art-based reflection provided a strong platform for self-care, connecting the Ally work with a spiritual dimension.

*Doing Mestizaje* presented great benefits for Ally work, as it allowed me to cross borders, to transgress and trespass different structures. It also provided a space for ambiguity in which multiple subjectivities could be negotiated. In addition it allowed me a space in which to let go of ideas, beliefs and concepts
regarding culture, and structures of power, to take the position of the conqueror and conquered.

Through this research I realized that Mestizos are part of both the privileged and oppressed groups. Furthermore, Mestizaje exist in the space between White and Indigenous, and influenced my Ally development and behavior. My self-reflection regarding my participation in the structures of oppression were accompanied with the expected emotions (Edwards, 2006, Helms, 1995) and confusion regarding race. These had had to be negotiated, understood and resolved.

Although literature presents guilt, morality, spirituality and empathy as the main reasons to begin the process of becoming an Ally (Edwards, 2006; Margaret, 2010; Bishop, 2000; Goodman, 2000) as a Mestiza my strongest motivation was the need to understand who I am; self liberate from the confusion and emotions created by an ambiguous education in which Indigenous was both priced and condemned; and finding ways to reconcile my Indigenous and White heritages.

Regarding burnout, my experience made me reflect on what Edward (2006) considers causes of burnout: “lack of praise and approval from the subordinate group” (p. 50) finding his proposition do not match my experience. His view does not consider the impact that working with oppressed, and fighting the systemic structures of oppression exercise on the Ally. Understanding burnout as an unmet Ally need, disregards the effect that hearing stories of trauma, and witnessing oppression have on Allies. It also does not address how to resolve burnout and emotions that accompany Ally work.
Regarding difficult emotions, literature explains they increase with the development of awareness of oppression and self-awareness of participation in the structure of oppression. My experience showed that mindfulness, divination, and art-based reflection address the emotional turmoil that can come with Ally work, allowing a space for expression and sublimation of experiences that help Allies move through the different status of Allyhood. These approaches also help Allies internalize race without feeling threatened by it. Furthermore, they can nurture the understanding of the complexity of oppression and the interdependence that exist between all forms of oppression. Finally these approaches proved to be a good medium for developing a sense of Oneness, and to foster the realization of the need to work for the liberation of all beings.

Finally this experience helped me develop strategies to support aspiring Allies in their development and work through an art-based approach. I realized that art classes offers a unique space to develop qualities to prepare students for Doing Mestizaje, as art classes expect students to become comfortable moving across mediums, textures, colors, shapes, shades and forms. Also art classes allow students observe the expressions of other artists and value the results of crossing emotional, philosophical, artistic, and expressive borders. Furthermore by giving students the time and space to explore their own artistic borders, art classes can help them expand their expressive capacities, and become mindful of the surrounding and inner worlds. Finally by helping students transfer art-making and art appreciation skills to other realms of their life, art education can assist students engage in Allyhood. Art education curriculum can support students explore the ways in which they participate in the structures of oppression in a constructive, creative, and supportive environment.
Chepwapisk’s learning outcomes

Chepwapisk said:

I was asked questions I had never been asked before. Sometimes they were hard to answer because they made me remember things I had chosen to forget because they are very painful. Yet it was good for me to remember. I am very happy I have a website. I like, I can share my teachings with others. I have the audios and it is good. I learned about Internet and all the possibilities. So many people are doing things on the Internet. I learned to use the programs and to record my teachings. I can communicate with people through Skype, that I like very much. (personal communication)

Future areas to be research

Working as an Ally, I came to understand this kind of practice requires a different learning and teaching approach. Development of an art-based/mindfulness Ally training program for college students and researching participant’s experiences on it is one of my interests for future research. Understanding decolonization as a grief process can allow Allies situate themselves as co-participants of this process.

Through my experience in this study and through the review of literature for it, I became aware of the ‘power over’ that exists in the teacher-student relationship. To explore teacher’s opinions regarding their participation in supporting structures of oppression seems an important theme to address in future research.
As an Art educator Doing Mestizaje allowed me perceive the existence of a place where three academic areas: visual culture, art therapy, and engaged art-social activism, meet each other. I believe it is very important to allow students cross back and forth the borders of these fields, becoming comfortable working in the space in-between them. I have already incorporated some of these ideas into my art education teaching, and I am interested in further developing a curriculum for art education in which these three areas can be equally addressed. Furthermore, I believe that through an engage art program it is possible to develop Ally qualities and is something I plan to further explore and develop.

My experience as a Mestiza, being oppressor and oppressed, made me reflect about the possible similarities that exit between a Mestizo experience of Allyhood, and that of Indigenous academics and politicians who are part of the oppressed group, but participate in structures of oppression. Research about identity development and Ally work of those who are both oppressed and privileged needs further attention.

As a result from this study, I came to understand Mestizaje as a way of crossing borders of gender, race, social status. This seems to be an important concept to consider and further explore from the art education perspective. Art is also a way of crossing borders and expressing the in-between.

**Other learning**

- The practice of Mindfulness allowed me to see the Ally work and the decolonizing process from a specific angle and I believed has helped me develop great friendships with the many Indigenous
people I have worked with and especially with the Medicine Man and Spiritual Teacher Chepwapisk.

- Understanding the Ally work as a Bodhisattva’s work, brings a sense of humbleness, compassion and wisdom to the Ally work and the resources to use when confronted with difficulties along the path.

- There are no fixed identities. They are constantly being constructed and reconstructed through the dynamics of thoughts, words and actions, and through trespassing, transgressing and crossing all kinds of borders.

- Engage in research and Allyhood as a ceremony. This establishes the premises for an ethical behavior and connects the work with a Spiritual dimension that characterizes Indigenous epistemologies.

- Work for all people regardless of race, color gender or social and economic status. Do not discriminate against White people, be compassionate and understanding, without allowing or participating in creating harm.

- Do not judge others; see everything as an opportunity for growth.

- Be aware of your personal interests

- Learn to enjoy Doing Mestizaje, being in-between spaces, or Nepantlear.
CHAPTER EIGHT: SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR ALLIES

Spiritual practices

*Formal mindfulness practices*

- Light a candle everyday to make the Ally work a Spiritual activity.
- Exercise a formal sitting mindfulness practice daily
  - Sit either in a cushion cross-legged or in a chair with both feet on the floor. Straighten my back and stretch the neck, tilting the head slightly to the front. Place the tip of the tongue in the soft palate, and either closed the eyes or look down in 45 degrees with a soft focus. Set an alarm clock for 20 minutes. Allow the mind to gently slow down and relax, without falling to sleep. In silence, began to count from 1-7, repeating the counting for the remaining time. When thought, sensations and/or emotions appear, do not reject or get attached to them. Let them pass by, as clouds moving with the wind.
- Reflect on interdependency. Look for the connection between everything and everybody.

*Informal mindfulness practices.*

- Sticky notes
  Placed around your house sticky notes with the word “now” around the house as reminder of coming to the present
moment. Whenever you encounter one stop any activity for at least 3 seconds to notice what the present is like.

- Finding the positive

Whenever you encounter a problem, try to find at least three positive things coming from this situation. This will allow you to see problems from different perspectives, develop flexibility, let go of fixed perceptions and change belief systems.

**Divination**

- Whenever stuck with a problem or not being able to find an answer to a question, consult the Medicine Cards oracle or any other oracle. New perceptions and teachings emerged from the unconscious and new possibilities arise.

**Heart opening**

- Reflect on the effects of hate, anger, and resentment and question their root causes.
- Be compassionate with self and others.
- Observe how thoughts can easily become words and actions.
- See mistakes as learning possibilities and not as failures.
- When self-judging or judging others, simply smile, recognize and let go of the judgment. Then ask, “Where did I learn the concepts I am using to judge now?”
o Follow intuitions and pay attention to gut feelings. The body is rarely wrong, but the mind is more often.

o Ally work is about relationships. It is a work that needs to be done with the heart. Ideologies can become a problem if not aligned with the heart.

o Express confusions, emotions struggles and tensions through art. This is an excellent way to create meaning, let go of stress and connect with intuition and Spirit. Creativity is required to address and resolve problems in the Ally work. Art making also helps develop and strengthen creative problem solving skills. Make an art piece, which includes doodles or scribbles regarding the Ally work at least once a week.

Art-based reflection activities

o Draw the problem you are facing and dialogue with the image to find the action to take.

o If experiencing emotions that are affecting the body, draw a body image and add a color in the places where the tension, stress, pain etc if felt.

o For grounding, find a piece of paper with some texture or fabric. Close your eyes and focus the attention of the sensation of touching the paper or fabric. Keep awareness of sensation and disregard any other distraction.

o Scribble with your eyes closed, listening to the sound of the pencil on the paper or the feeling of the hand as it moves.
○ Paint your feelings.
○ Make a collage that represents the alliance.
○ Create a symbol that represents your strengths as an Ally.
○ Create a vision board of your ideal as an Ally, what you want to achieve and how you plan to achieve your goals.
○ Create a drawing of the idea you have regarding what the person you are in alliance with expects from you.

*Emotional health care and burnout prevention*

○ Find help if emotions and feelings build up and they are affecting your life. This is common, so don’t feel this is wrong. Being healthy and happy you can do better work.
○ Give yourself time. Don’t engage in more than you can handle. Prevent burnt-out.
○ Look to talk with other Allies, and even develop an Ally group to share experiences.
○ Make teachers, researchers and institutions aware of the need for support and training that Allies have.
○ Be an advocate of change, but remember change brings loss and grief, and they need to be addressed and resolved.

*Questions to explore: a guide for aspiring Allies*

Students, who want to engage in social activism and become Allies, need to reflect on their participation in the structures of oppression. This includes
reflecting on the institution and schools in which they study, as well as the classes and teachings they receive. Following I present some questions that can be use as a guide for this reflection.

• Who benefits from the education programs and classes you are taking?
• Is the dominant system denied or not addressed in your faculty or class?
• Does the class constrain or shape in any way a persons life chances and senses of possibilities?
• Are privileges or unearned advantages foster and sustained through the course?
• How many Indigenous or Méti teachers are or have been part of the education program in your faculty/school?
• How many hours are dedicated in the class to explore non-white views?
• Does the curriculum look to dismantle racism and oppression? If so how?
• Does the program encourage different cultural styles, if so which and how?
• Are student and teachers expected to understand and explore the structure of oppression and to develop strategies to dismantle them?
• How does the institution determine current needs of non-white students?
• Does teacher's evaluations include antiracist preparedness and practices?

**Specific questions for Art Educators**

• Does the class explore non-White art production related to racism, oppression and power?
• How are student-teachers being trained regarding the use of art to support social justice?

• How many hours do teachers dedicate in their programs to Engaged Art projects?

• Are image-development concepts linked to life experiences?

• Does the curriculum address the areas of visual culture, art therapy and engaged art and the spaces in between where these area touch each other?

• Are students exploring how can their art-work create social change?

• Is the art class developing mindfulness skills among students?

Questions regarding the use of oracles

• What kind of advantages does the White dominant group received from considering other epistemologies, and form of research unreliable and invalid?

• What kind of benefits can the use of oracles bring to the student-teachers training?

• What kind of knowledge and insights can the use of oracles bring to the classroom setting?

• What kind of insights can student gain from observing and learning about animal behavior?
Doing Mestizaje
Letting go
Movement
Wonder
Change
The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our language, our thoughts. A massive uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness is the beginning of a long struggle, but one that could, in our best hopes, bring us to the end of rape, of violence, of war

(Anzaldúa 1987, p.102).
Doing Mestizaje

Mending my wounds

Allies - midwifes in the process

Giving birth to ourselves, supporting the birthing of others.

Feeding the Spiritual Fire
The Journey

Once I thought I knew everything. I felt like an expert
And even thought my skin was dark
my mind was white and my conduct the same as a colonizer.

But this adventure, made me reflect,
I thought about the concept of Ally,
one who works with others to support them in their struggle.
I found myself trying to build a difficult puzzle
created believing in a separate self
between I and Them.

I laughed and cried when I saw this joke,
You and I are One and with the Earth as well.
Your agenda is my own and so is your struggle,
I am not helping anyone, just being kind to myself.

Today I can say with absolute humbleness,
that these experiences have helped me know my culture and myself.
I have walked one step in a new direction
getting out of the confusion and crazy mess.

I have become more humble, and now I can say,
I do not know much so please don’t ask me as I have nothing to say.
I’m still grasping to a separate self, hoping to let go one day.
Then, only then I will be a true Ally,
I’ll be a good friend to you and to myself.

For now I have to rest and go home with my bag of questions
Yet turning back and seeing the work Chepwapisk and I did together,
I smile; I guess that is good for now.
Maybe someday I will have some answers to offer
and reduce my heavy weight.
Doing Mestizaje, a way of life

Crossing all borders

No borders

Interdependence

Oneness

May my work bring benefit to all beings
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