

**Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyītamowin –
Wise Women of the Cree, Denesuline, Inuit and Métis:
Understandings of Storywork, Traditional Knowledges and Eco-justice among
Indigenous Women Leaders**

by

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Abstract

Environmental racism has recently entered the realm of academic inquiry and although it currently sits in a marginalized category, Indigenous and environmental communities and scholars have acknowledged it as an important subject of critical inquiry. With roots in southern Americana history, environmental racism has had a limited scope of study within Canadian universities. Few Canadian scholars have presented the rippling effects of this critical phenomenon to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and the challenge to bring this discourse to the universities of Canada remains significant. Mainstream educators and environmentalists dismiss discourses of environmental racism, ecological destruction and the correlating demise of Indigenous peoples' knowledges, cultures and wellness as an insignificant and sometimes radical propaganda. In opposition, Indigenous peoples globally are countering this dismissal by telling their stories to ensure all have access to the discourses of environmental racism found within the ecological destructions of traditional lands and the cultural genocides of their peoples. The stories of their histories and the subsequent activism define the resistances found within Indigenous communities. These same stories show the resiliencies of Aboriginal peoples in their quest for self-determination. Using an Indigenous research methodological framework, this study seeks to provide an understanding of the complexities associated with incidences of environmental racism found within Canadian Aboriginal communities. It further seeks to find, analyze and report the depth of resistance and resilience found within the storywork of Aboriginal women. The researcher attempts to gain perspective from eight Aboriginal women of four distinct Nations by focusing on the context of their

lives in relationship to their leadership decisions and actions from a worldview of Indigenous knowledge, eco-justice and peace. The lived experiences of Aboriginal women from the traditional lands of the Cree, the Denesuline, the Inuit and the Métis are critical to an analysis of how environmental racism is dismantled and wellness sought. The storywork of these participants provides answers as to how these Aboriginal women have come to resist environmental racism and why they currently lead others in the protection and sustainability of traditional lands, Aboriginal knowledge, culture and kinship wellness. Framed within Indigenous research methodology, all researcher actions within the study, including the collection, analysis and reporting of multiple data sources, followed the ceremonial tradition and protocols of respect and reciprocity found among Aboriginal peoples. Data from semi-structured qualitative interviews and written questionnaires was analyzed from the supportive western method of grounded theory. Findings revealed the strength of Storywork through the primary themes of Woman as Land and Woman as Healer. These are discussed through the Sisters' embodiment of resistance, reflection, re-emergence and re-vitalization. The ways in which these Indigenous women have redeemed their knowledges and resurged as leaders is integral to the findings. The study concludes with an emphasis on the criticality of collective witnessing as transformation.

Key words: Aboriginal, Cree, critical inquiry, Denesuline, ecological destruction, eco-justice, environmental racism, grounded theory, Indigenous, Indigenous research methodologies, Indigenous knowledge, Inuit, Métis, peace, resilience, resistance, storywork, wellness

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I honour all those in my life work who have supported me on this journey of awakening. In this honouring I acknowledge the Swampy Cree meaning of *Kakinow ni wagamakanak*—the degree to which we are all related—and I thank Alex Wilson for sharing this with me. I have found through this work that, indeed, we are all related. I am gratefully for this discovery and for the blessings I have received from many Elders, scholars, traditional knowledge keepers, teachers, children and young people.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and to those who have become like family ...

... to all the women of *Sisters*, Marie, Ila, Jennifer, Joan, Rose, Stella, Tammy, and

Yvonne: Throughout this journey your smiles, your tears, and your endurances have inspired me. Your collective vision has moved my heart and soul.

... to my grandmothers, Cecile Briere Fowler and Katherina Heinz Kress: I smile when I think of your stories, your teachings and your love for family. And I smile wider when I think of your vegetable gardens and your love of wild roses and tamed geraniums.

... to my parents, Florence and Peter Kress: I thank you for all the land living and big skies I received as a child. The love I have for telling and hearing a good story is deeply embedded in the lifeblood of our people; when you grow up with that, you just know it's a great thing! The love I have for the lands of Saskatchewan and beyond are due to you both, as one learns love of place early in life. Thank you for seeing the spirit of the land and the spirit of peoples as one and the same.

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Chapter One: Background to the Study

*I pass to you the teaching of Laara Fitznor,
and as she does, I offer Ke nuna'skomitinawow (I thank you) to Manitou
and to all those who have given me lessons and opportunities to engage
in a work that acknowledges Mother Earth and her inhabitants.*

*This work seeks to honour the knowledges of my ancestors
and that of traditional peoples as I search for ways to address the
social and ecological challenges faced by Indigenous peoples.*

In thinking about a transformative research paradigm, I reflect upon my teaching and life experiences with children and youth who live in fragile environments. Words like *at risk, desolate, impoverished, undesirable* and *unhealthy* come to mind as I have stood as a witness to the fragility found in these environments and the precarious life circumstances of the children, youth, and adults who live here. These observations affirm my theoretical understandings of human marginalization, perpetuated by constructs of racism, ableism, environmental destruction, and poverty—and all of them tied to colonial imperialism (Battiste, 2008; Durst & Bluehardt, 2001). Cree Elder and storyteller, Wes Fineday (2010) and past Grand Chief Phil Fontaine (2008, 2010) believe the increasing social and moral crises within Canadian Aboriginal communities are reflective of the hopelessness and despair their members experience. Elevated numbers of youth suicides in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories exemplify the many “challenges faced by young people navigating issues of education, drugs, suicide, cultural identity and personal identity” (Bonny, 2007, p. 13). Several other Western studies cite the significance of holistic wellness and its criticalness to the future life outcomes of youth, and in particular, their social capital (Porter, 2009; White, Beaven & Spence, 2007). Essentially, the formative years of Aboriginal children and adolescents exert significant impact on the sustainability of their kinships and the *Earth* as we know it.

One must ask then, why the despair, the chaos and the sadness? Why are these youth failing to thrive? What has happened to their kinships and communities?

In this critique, I have come to believe one of the most significant issues facing Aboriginal peoples is environmental racism. This systemic form of racism not only destroys and depletes natural resources and nature itself; it impacts the social, cultural, and spiritual identities of Indigenous peoples (International Indian Treaty Council, 2008, para 6). Dhillon and Young (2010) contend Canadian environmental destruction and injustices are of significant “magnitude” and these injustices “represent a legacy of racist practices experienced by First Nations peoples” (2010, p.25). It has been professed that environmental racism is the new colonialism (Gosine & Teelucksingh, 2008; Westra, 2005).

Although numerous First Nations communities, minority groups and many environmental and Indigenous scholars and activists call for reform, the critique is sparse, particularly within Canadian educational institutions and governments (Dhillon and Young, 2010; Gosine & Teelucksingh, 2008) and, thus, it is time to engage in a study of this nature. To understand the depth and breadth of environmental racism in Canada, one must wrestle with the history of colonization, the destruction and theft of Indigenous lands and entities, the dislocation of peoples and knowledges, and the justification of an economic framework which sanctions the industrialization of sacred lands and those they sustain.

Neo-colonialism attaches itself to the wide berth of government as it privileges and justifies corporate actions related to the capitalist system founded in western resource development and in the appropriations of Indigenous lands and knowledges. This new

colonialism creates a safe buffer for those institutions defending their racist actions as necessary and normal. As environmental racism and the frays of ecological and cultural destruction found within its path diminishes the life wellness of all peoples, the activities of governments and corporations are implicated, particularly as they infringe on traditional lands of Indigenous peoples. Seemingly, it is *business as usual* here in Canada as the justification for development out-hinges the needs of a healthy biosphere. It has long been known the activities related to mining development, forestry and logging initiatives, water diversions and dams, agriculture and chemical manipulation, oil and gas development, and recreation and tourism initiatives have not served Aboriginal peoples. Rather, these populations have felt the insidious effects of poverty and ill health. The destruction of *Mother Earth* found in the homelands of the Cree and the Dene, the Métis and the Inuit, and numerous Indigenous groups around the globe continues to escalate, and with it, the illness of its people.

Researcher's Positionality

At the start of this research journey, I began to think about pressing societal issues that have been interfacing with my positionality. I reflected upon my thoughts, my actions, my circumstances, and most importantly my relationships. My current view of what has transpired over three decades of engagement is filtered through the lenses of a community developer and educator, mother and teacher. I think about the places I have called home and how the land of my ancestors influenced who I have become and perhaps the paths I have chosen. I think about the hospitalities and generosities that Indigenous peoples have graced me with as I have entered their traditional lands, their homes and communities, offices and schools. I contemplate how I might share my own

positionality with those who choose to participate in this research. I reflect upon what my research design might look like and whom it would serve. I imagine what an “Indigenous research methodology” (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008) is and how the methods employed will benefit the people and communities whose invitations have honoured me. My recent acknowledgement of relationality has become a critical part of my reflection. It is this acknowledgement that requires my sharing as I continue this journey.

As a Métis woman who has recently uncovered my own history, I believe the first step in developing an Indigenous research methodology is to locate your positionality. It is through this personal work that I became an authentic and ethically grounded researcher. This ontological search helped me ensure my interactions and thoughts were driven by cognitive and emotional sensitivities while engaged in research with Indigenous peoples. In order to gain the trust of an Indigenous community, the trust of those members who will participate in a collective research, you must be able to present your authenticity to these members. Martin (2003) contends that when you explore and share your own life, you become open to others as you gain self-awareness and develop true responsibility in ethical ways. Through self-identification and the placement of your identity, your ontology, you enter the vulnerable state of authenticity, as desired within Indigenous communities. It is this vulnerability that supports a researcher in the trust of new relations.

To arrive at this understanding of ontology, I drew from the work of Anderson (2000) and her reference to "blood memory". To ground oneself within an ethical framework and to consciously place the axiology of Indigenous research within your

research design and process, one must seek to understand the significance of Indigenous knowledge and spirituality. For me this is a critical part of whom I am and how I came to be engaged in this work. Blood memory (Anderson, 2000) has spidered into a web of connections and from it the development of relationships has occurred. This genetic pre-coding has significant value to persons of Indigenous ancestry, especially for those of us who seek to legitimize our intuitive knowings. Previous to my understanding of this phenomenon, I wondered about the relationality of these occurrences and what led to the “chance” meetings and my newly formed relationships. To fully appreciate “blood memory” (Anderson, 2000), I believe I must advance my ontology to help me project an ethical participation within this Indigenous research and with the participants I invited to this study.

Martin (2003) speaks of this type of examination as relational ontology. The connections one has with other Aboriginal peoples, the land, the environment and the entities are critical to my understanding of what it means to "become" an ethical researcher engaged in Indigenous research methodology. Absolon and Willett (2005) show how “location of voice,” from which scholars and researchers posit authenticity, generates a segue to transparency and reciprocity. Within this research study, I intend to show my “location of voice” as without this declaration of position, I would continue to write from the *colonized* state. As Aboriginal researchers, Absolon and Willett (2005) along with Allen (1998) and Monture-Agnus (1995) know the only thing we can “write about with authority is ourselves” (p. 97). This engagement in Indigenous research means you must share your life with those you are working with at the beginning of the research process.

The development of an ontological position as personal location is central to my quest of engaging in an Indigenous research methodology. The relationship you have with yourself is very important as a factor of axiology (Wilson, 2008). Who we are and what we do matters, every decision to engage in action or non-action is important, and how we reflect upon these decisions is critical within the conducting of educational research (Fineday, 2010). How we connect to *Mother Earth* and all her entities, the earth itself, water, air, animals, plants and people, are centralized within Indigenous knowledge. This interrelatedness and interdependence with all other entities forms who we are and how we will interact with those who are participants in our queries.

Martin (2003) indicates there is a “kindredness” that exists within this understanding of relational ontology. I believe this to be true. Stella Blackbird, Elder and Traditional Keeper of Medicines, has shown me that relationality through “blood memory” is not a chance event. Martin (2003) gives the directive that one must explore ontological relationality by listening, sensing, conceptualizing, assessing, modeling, engaging and applying knowledge that has been shared. One acquires the position of sharing knowledge of Aboriginal research participants only through relationship. I believe this acquisition comes through a journey and as Wes Fineday, Elder and storyteller, states: *To become a knowledge keeper one has to earn one's place*. In thinking about his words, I believe that my journey within Indigenous research implies I must engage in the process of relationality from a framework of respect, responsibility and reciprocity (Kovach, 2010). This process encourages me to explore my own place of being as a central focus within Indigenous research methodology. In earning one's place, I believe you must unearth the very core of who you are, how you have come to be, and

why this study is an important lifework to you. With this action, I believe I will become authentic to those I invite to share in the research process.

As I continue to journey on this research path, I strive to maintain respect for all others engaged in this process, especially those who have invited me to learn from their knowledges, for all earth entities and *Mother Earth*. I strive to follow sacred laws that exist as natural laws of many Aboriginal peoples—respect, love, truth, kindness, courage, wisdom and humility—as I learn from and bring my knowledge to others (LaDuke, 2006; Sinclair, 2004; Simpson, 2000). I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and wisdoms of Cree Elder and Medicine Woman Stella Blackbird as I do my own parents, Florence and Peter Kress. I thank my children, Andrew, Robin and Mackenzie, as I embrace the lesson of parent who is teacher. The many life lessons I have gained from each of these “teachers” have given me courage, humility and a sense of awe as I think about the spiritual undertaking of engaging in Indigenous research. I heed the words of Louis Riel and those of my Métis ancestors as I proceed with this research:

*My people will sleep for one hundred years when they awake,
it will be the artists who give them their spirit back.*

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to unearth the characteristics, ethical actions, and directives of eight Indigenous women who lead others in the work of healing and ecological justice as they address realities of environmental racism. The life works and leadership styles of these women were investigated to look for peace and justice initiatives that follow similar patterns. Each participant had the opportunity to reflect upon and provide a story that shaped her present stance. Personal and family histories were queried. How each participant’s current role, leadership style and decision-making

influence community, family and individual wellness was explored. How these women see themselves, whether they are peace activists, educators, social justice instigators, is an important part of the vision I explored. Their resiliencies, through the recognition, reclaiming and advancement of their Indigenous identities are an important consideration in this research study.

The methodology of this research project includes the development of two questionnaires for written submission and conducting personal interviews within the Indigenous framework of “*Storywork*” (Archibald, 2000). The data collection including the conducting of individual interviews, the return and review of transcribed data by participants, and follow-up communication with participants took place over a six-month period. Individual interviews were conducted in the home communities or upon the traditional lands of the participants, either in person or by telephone. Each interview was audio or video recorded, the choice being decided upon by the participant. Notes, transcriptions and tapes from these sessions were kept in my computer system under a locked password and hard copies were stored within a locked cabinet in my office. All interviews were transcribed by myself or in part by a transcriber, either manually or with supportive software. Multiple data sources, including that of the questionnaires, storywork process and interview, supporting literatures, photographs, and cultural maps were utilized to present a thematic analysis utilizing grounded theory. The data are presented in chapter four, five, and six of the thesis. The final chapter provides a synthesis of this data.

Research Study Questions

Thesis question:

How are Indigenous woman in Canada using leadership and healing to address environmental racism and ecological destruction found within their traditional territories?

Sub questions:

How does environmental racism display itself within Indigenous communities?

How are traditional lands influenced by ecological destruction?

How are Indigenous women's actions influencing the children and youth of their communities?

How are these same actions influencing educators and school cultures?

What future directives can Indigenous women provide for policy development and curricula evolution in the areas of eco-literacy, environmental justice and peace education?

Significance of the Study

Environmental racism has been the study of American scholars and activists since the 1970s. Bullard's (2005) steadfast adherence to unearthing white privilege around toxic waste disposal within communities occupied by peoples of colour is a prevalent theme relevant to Aboriginal communities in Canada. In Canada there are small pockets of researchers studying environmental racism and its effects or outcomes, however, the voices of these scholars have not reached most mainstream university students or Aboriginal youth. This study unearths and exposes the context of environmental racism as placed upon Aboriginal peoples, their lands and their kinships as it sets a new foundation for listening to the voices of Aboriginal women leaders. As an investigative

medium, this study collects the stories of personal and collective resistances, moments of activism and initiatives of peace, to determine how Indigenous and gender specific leadership supports new paradigms of holistic, interdependent and spiritual wellness.

Limitations of the Study

Although the sampling of participants in this study is small, the Aboriginal women live within a significant range of occupancy among distinct Aboriginal Nations and territories. The management of travel logistics between the participants and myself created a small barrier within the process of a collective sharing, however, I built a sharing process for all the participants into the methods and debriefing components of the study. The benefits of inviting participants from diverse communities and kinships within Canada far outweighed the challenges of distance. I believed this wide occupancy and the knowledges that came from these varied and distinct traditions, and the multiple data sources, including that of *Storywork* (Archibald, 2008), enabled me to engage in an analysis that garnered a rich contribution of knowledges held within the leadership of these Aboriginal women.

The advancement of *Storywork as Methodology* is a relatively new undertaking within the context of qualitative research; however, it has existed within Indigenous models of research for decades. Although it is similar to narrative inquiry and analysis, there are a few distinct differences. The uncharted territory of *Storywork* as a holistic, cosmic entity, and the cyclic and sometimes mystic nature of Indigenous stories (and the challenge of analysis around this), held together through the spiritual and ceremonial contexts of Indigenous story principles may be considered a “resistance” methodology that poses a challenge within western academia (Kovach, 2009). In reality, Indigenous

research methodologies have moved away from mainstream qualitative methodologies and their currencies allow them to exist as distinct entities in the world of academic research (Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009; Michell, 2012)). Kovach (2009) asserts many Aboriginal scholars engaged in the collection, analysis and dissemination of Indigenous research may continue to be met with resistance by some western academics as Indigenous researchers and their “ways of knowing”, “ways of being” and “ways of doing” are intuitive and driven from a context of spiritual and cosmic understanding (Martin, 2003). It is hoped this study enables future development for *Storywork* to exist as an embraced Indigenous Research Methodology.

Definition of Terms

Aboriginal: refers to the Aboriginal people of Canada, including those who identify as First Nations, Inuit and Métis. It also refers to persons who are registered under the *Indian Act of Canada* as having Treaty Indian status.

Aboriginal people of Canada are defined as such in this country in the *Constitution Act, 1982, Section 35 (2)*. For the purposes of this study Aboriginal also refers to persons of Aboriginal ancestry who may be considered non-status.

Environmental racism: a form of racism that has been linked to the practices of land use, particularly those practices that place distress upon minority peoples, Indigenous peoples or peoples of colour, while simultaneously placing significant environmental stress on the lands they occupy. Bullard (1993) links environmental racism to colonialism and white privilege and he believes the United States was founded on “free land” (stolen from Native Americans and Mexicans), “free labor” (cruelly extracted from African slaves) and “free men” (white men with property) (p. 16). He questions why

environmental regulations are enforced in some communities and dismissed in others. This inequality, seen as a new colonialism, often deters minority groups such as Canadian newcomers and Indigenous peoples from participating in ecological decisions affecting their communities and traditional territories (Gosine & Teelucksingh, 2008). As an insidious form of racism it ultimately infringes on the health and welfare of kinships and communities. It sustains itself with *status quo* business assurances of environmental assessments, policy-making procedures, and laws that purport to take into account the best interests of all. Essentially, these invasive, destructive and hegemonic governmental and industrial practices involve developments and activities associated with hydro-electricity, mining, forestry, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and recreation and tourism. Polluting industries, waste facilities and repositories are most often situated upon the lands of minority peoples. Westra (1999) sees the positioning of Aboriginal Canadians fighting environmental racism as precarious, and through her investigative legal scholarship and activism, she shows how the Canadian legal system, government dismissals, and military enforcements have applied constraints that have been repressive and violent. The International Indian Treaty Council (2008) cites the loss of biodiversity, culture, language and spirit through the contamination, devastation and denial of access to waters and traditional lands. Members believe that environmental racism is the primary cause of human health demise among Indigenous peoples in North America and around the globe.

Environmental justice: a process that ensures the fair treatment and meaningful involvement in the peoples' decision making for the protections of eco-systems, the living environments of water, traditional lands, kinships and all living entities. It ensures

equal environmental protection for all peoples and their lands, regardless of ethnicity, race, gender or socio-economic status. Although environmental justice is largely a process built by westerners, Indigenous peoples and grassroots organizations are now challenging status quo understandings of what this means. Today's Indigenous activists recognize their inherent rights as Aboriginal peoples. In *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada* (2009), Indigenous scholars find solidarity and voice as they challenge others to recognize the innate knowledges of Indigenous peoples and their interrelationship with *Mother Earth* and her living entities. As a justice movement that networks peoples to oppose destructive operations and the repression and exploitation of lands, peoples, cultures and all life forms, it acts as an educational forum for present and future generations regarding the importance of honouring *Mother Earth* and her living entities (Bullard, 1999).

Grounded theory: this qualitative method that stems from data collection is used within a variety of qualitative research methodologies including Indigenous research. In the analysis of the data, key points are identified and then coded. Coding may be a formal and systemic process or sometimes it is done in an informal way. A series of textual codes are usually organized or grouped into similar concepts (chunking of data) to find common themes. Themes are examined and coded into further groups known as categories, and it is the categories that often form a basis to create a hypothesis or new theory. This theory is defended with a collection of explanations that expand upon the research of a given study. Field notes, memos, questionnaires, cultural maps, transcribed interviews from storywork or oral histories may contribute to the data and the key points (words, phrases, nuances that highlight important issues) found may be continuously

coded. This can be done by way of open, axial or selective coding which is usually organized in thematic grids (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding is “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Axial coding permits the reorganizing of categories from the open coding stage and it helps the researcher identify a central phenomenon and to explore the conditions within that phenomenon. Selective coding supports the researcher in determining theory as it supports substantiating a theory relative to a problem within the study. It involves “the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). Once initial codes are developed from qualitative data such as transcripts, informal conversations and observations, Strauss and Corbin (1990) advocate for a continuous review of themed categories and new literatures. An ongoing constant comparative analysis of the data instigates the researcher’s movement towards a theory of action or further investigation (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Memoing and sorting are embedded within the comparative analysis and are both important aspects within the grounded theory method. Researchers often use codebooks and software to organize concepts, themes, and categories. This review and constant comparison is a required process in the development of theory. Often this process stimulates the researcher to search for and collect further data. Grounded theory encourages the researcher to select subjects that may potentially support the discovery of as many conditions related to the phenomenon as possible (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Indigenous people: Peoples whom self-identify as a distinct cultural group within specific geographical locations. They often are attached to ancestral territories and the natural resources of these lands and they exist within a subsistence-oriented production. Many speak an Indigenous language that is often a minority language within their state country and they honour and practice traditional teachings and ceremony. (Further clarification can be found on p. 130.)

Indigenous knowledge: stems from an Indigenous worldview that underscores the importance of Indigenous philosophy and heritage. “Leanne Simpson (2000) outlined seven principles of Indigenous worldviews. First, knowledge is holistic, cyclic, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities. Second, there are many truths, and these truths are dependent upon individual experiences. Third, everything is alive. Fourth, all things are equal. Fifth, the land is sacred. Sixth, the relationship between people and the spiritual world is important. Seventh, human beings are least important in the world (Hart, 2010, p.3). The relationship between Indigenous peoples and their lands signifies a knowledge that is local, holistic and oral (Maurial, 1999). This relationality is central to the knowledges Indigenous peoples hold and it is tied to kinship, ceremony and ancestral spirit guidance. Mahia Maurial (1999) defined Indigenous knowledge as “ ‘the peoples’ cognitive and wise legacy as a result of their interaction with nature in a common territory” (Hart, 2010, p.3). Westerners often define Indigenous knowledge as “the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around the specific conditions of women and men Indigenous to a particular geographic area” (Grenier, 1998), however, Battiste (2002) cautions researchers about this simplicity. Indigenous knowledge is much more

than the binary of western knowledge and in Canada it is constitutionally protected (Battiste and Henderson, 2000). It is inherently tied to the land, the particular land of kinship occupancy and travel, and the land of ancestral beings and living entities.

Battiste (2002) draws from the scholarship of Morphy (1995) and Basso (1996) to assert it is tied to “particular landscapes, landforms, and biomes where ceremonies are properly held, stories properly recited, medicines properly gathered, and transfers of knowledge properly authenticated” (p.13). “Indigenous knowledge thus embodies a web of relationships within a specific ecological context; contains linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system; has localized content and meaning; has established customs with respect to acquiring and sharing of knowledge (not all Indigenous peoples equally recognize their responsibilities); and implies responsibilities for possessing various kinds of knowledge” (Battiste, 2002, p.14).

Indigenous research methodologies: is a de-colonizing research methodological framework that moves beyond a western research paradigm. It stems from the fundamental belief in relationality, through all living and spirit entities and the cosmos. It is believed that all knowledge is relational and must be shared with all of creation (Wilson, 2001). It is cyclical and balanced and cannot be separated from its tradition or roots. Garrouette (2003) believes it is sacred and spiritual in nature and she resists western ideologies that dismiss this belief. The principles of Indigenous knowledge and tradition of story permeates the framework. Relationality, reciprocity and respect for all ways of knowing are integral. Wilson (2001) defines the pieces of an Indigenous research paradigm in this way:

Ontology or a belief in the nature of reality. Your way of being, what you believe

is real in the world...Second is epistemology, which is how you think about that reality. Next, when we talk about research methodology, we are talking about how you are going to use your way of thinking (your epistemology) to gain more knowledge about your reality. Finally, a paradigm includes axiology, which is a set of morals or a set of ethics (p. 175).

Epistemologies or ways of knowing are integral to the researcher and the process.

Indigenous epistemology is

a fluid way of knowing derived from teachings transmitted from generation to generation by storytelling, where each story is alive with the nuances of the storyteller. It emerges from traditional languages emphasizing verbs, is garnered through dreams and visions, and is intuitive and introspective. Indigenous epistemology arises from the interconnections between the human world, the spirit, and inanimate entities (Hart, 2010, p.8).

It is embedded in community praxis and it has a reliance on Elders and others who can look “inward” or practice *mamatowisowin*, a Cree term for creative use of all faculties and looking inward to gather strength (Ermine, 1995). The spiritual practice of research comes to one through this capacity. The methodology of Indigenous research allows one to be who she is. At the same time, it demands accountability to one’s positionality and it expects the researcher to be authentic in this sharing. This process transforms the researcher and affirms responsibility and respect to every relation the researcher has. It is a collective movement that implies a commitment to those who are engaged in the research process. Kovach (2005) believes one must only engage in research if one is prepared to use it in a good way. This implies reciprocity and accountability to all

individuals and kinships the researcher encounters during and long after the research study ends. Indigenous research methodologies are ceremonial and long living. They insist on reciprocity, respect and accountability.

Summary

This research study explores the lives and stories of Aboriginal women, their resilience in becoming political and spiritual leaders in the addressing of environmental racism and ecological destructions found within their traditional territories, and what this means as they provide direction for Aboriginal youth of Canada and their respective kinships. I envision this research as an ethical partnership to ensure the hearing of Canadian Indigenous women's voices as they address environmental racism through leadership, spirituality and healing. Additionally, I am hopeful an analysis of their positionality, their Aboriginal worldview, and their actions may lend guidance to those developing future pedagogies and policy directives for school and university cultures, and particularly to those who are advancing Indigenous and ecological knowledges.

As known, Aboriginal peoples in Canada are not homogenous. They embody much cultural diversity and a multitude of “knowings” tied to language and place. Although their identities are multi-faceted and diverse, Indigenous women have the significant commonality of understanding colonial constructs of history and neo-colonial implications of today. These women are “keepers” of knowledges based on their collective Indigenous relationality with each other, *Mother Earth* and her entities. Their knowledges are critical to the holistic growth and self-determination of Aboriginal children and youth, and thus, the sustainability of their cultures, their kinships and *Mother Earth*, herself. I am hopeful this study will lend vision to the development of a

Canadian discourse on environmental racism, and through the *Storywork* of Aboriginal resistance and resiliency, reemergence and redemption, one will glean motivation and hope as she moves forward with a sustainability agenda to benefit all kinships and the *Earth* as we know it.

Chapter 2: A Review of Related Literature

This overview of the relevant literature focuses on the conceptual, theoretical and real life discourses that shape environmental racism. Throughout this exploration, I define what it is, how it displays itself, how it affects Aboriginal Canadians and their kinships. Those who oppose this insidious form of racism are generating networks of defense through awareness and strategic resistance found within Aboriginal knowledges and eco-justice. The scholarship of Indigenous peoples grows and many critical investigative journalists, artists and scholars cite their activism. A stronghold of Indigenous women's voices and actions defines their determination in dismantling this new form of racism.

A Call for Critical Research within Canada

*When I first encountered First Nations people, they told me
we are made of the four sacred elements: earth, air, fire and water.
As I reflected on that, I realized we've framed the environmental problem the wrong way.
There's no environment "out there" for us to interact with.
We are the environment, because we are the Earth.
For me, that began a whole shift in the way that I looked at the issues that confront
us and the way we live on this planet.*

David Suzuki

Racism, homophobia and ableism are growing living entities that fill landscapes and leave residues and disease. Within western societies and institutions, these entities take up space and situate themselves as oppressive societal constructs, deemed as deep or shallow, wide or narrow (Peter, T., 2011). The phenomenon of environmental racism situated both widely and deeply within contemporary societies requires the significant attention of scholars in its labeling and critique. This systematic infusion of racism found in the practices of bureaucrats, and by their protection of institutions, policies, and actions

as necessary human activity defaults to an accepted societal process often normalized, hidden or ignored. As this normalization works to diminish the critique of dissidents, often, even those who are negatively impacted by the outcomes of environmental racism fail to see the realities of this insidious form of discrimination. Those instigating this normalization rely on public complacency and the acceptance of actions by those privileged through dominant ideologies and economies founded in western colonized states. Permeated within western societies, environmental racism can be identified through the actions (or non-actions) of governments, industries and corporations in the exploration, extrapolation, development and use of land and earth resources around the globe (Westra, 2008).

Canadian interest in the critique of environmental racism is scarce, and it seems this form of resistance research is still viewed as a marginalized form of research in Canada (Gosine & Teelucksingh, 2008). Recently the *Idle No More* movement has sparked a global recognition of the oppressions Indigenous peoples experience through historical colonization and today's governmental and industry policy based on euro-centric histories of land use and knowledges. Even with the inroads that the *Idle No More* movement has made, and with a call for reform from numerous First Nations communities, minority groups and many environmental and Indigenous scholars and activists, the critique remains sparse. What is it, particularly within Canadian educational institutions and governments, that deters this discourse?

To understand the depth and breadth of environmental racism in Canada, one must wrestle with the history of colonization and the destruction and stealing of Indigenous lands and entities, peoples and knowledges. The magnitude of these

injustices is significant and they constitute a legacy of racist practices visited upon all Aboriginal peoples (Dhillon & Young, 2010). Neo-colonialism attaches itself to the justification of government and corporate actions as these institutions defend their racist actions as necessary and normal. It is business as usual here in Canada. In opposition to this normalizing of environmental activity or business, a few scholars and activists ensure a rigorous and public critique (Dhillon & Young, 2010). They are often seen as bold radicals as they profess that outcomes of environmental racism are correlated to eco-crime and genocide (Harding, 2011; Thomas-Mueller, 2009; Westra, 2008).

Examples of environmental racism exist in all communities and territories around the globe and these realities are especially accentuated within Indigenous territories. Environmental racism impacts peoples of all continents, and the racist industrial and corporate activities of western countries are found in many nations and communities defined as impoverished, 3rd world or even 4th world (Angus, 2012). Of particular note are the communities and lands in which peoples of colour live, those which have existed from time immemorial. Dhillon and Young (2010) contend that although incidences of environmental injustices are found globally, the over representation of First Nations and Indigenous communities in this classification, justifies the labeling of these acts against Aboriginal peoples in Canada as environmental racism. The following discussion prepares one for a historical and contemporary understanding of environmental racism, environmental injustice, and Aboriginal resistance.

Defining Environmental Racism

*They got these energy companies who want the land
And they've got churches by the dozens
Want to guide our hands
And sign Mother Earth over to pollution, war and greed
Get rich... get rich quick. Bury my heart at Wounded Knee*

Buffy St. Marie

When searching for understandings of this phenomenon associated with environmental destruction, ecological illness and cultural genocide, one must explore the differences within literatures, particularly those from environmental justice and law, ecological literacy, Indigenous knowledges and critical pedagogies. Discourses of critical race theory, ecological and social justice pedagogies and western ideologies found within ecology, epidemiology, anthropology, sociology and economics are also helpful parameters, as together these literatures present complex ideas and a merged analysis of what environmental racism is and what environmental justice might be. Often mainstream environmental discourses avoid the environmental racism critique and only on occasion the researcher finds those who embrace and situate it at the center of all justice frameworks; thus the need to review a myriad of discourses is critical.

Members of communities impacted by environmental racism are often rendered politically and economically impoverished. In this analysis, Dillon and Young (2010), Cook (2006) and Draper & Mitchell (2001) show environmental racism as a cyclical process, one which sustains itself through dis-empowered communities and ultimately, the inability of members to act. Essentially, these members have been denied citizenship rights.

In these situations, corporations and governments have threatened the social capital of both the collective and the individual. Dis-empowerment occurs while bureaucrats develop environmental policy and dismiss local “ways of knowing”. Those most affected by land and resource development are diminished and disempowered. Collectively, this business of policy development creates the phenomenon of *voicelessness* as it works to keep minorities, peoples of colour, Aboriginal peoples, and the working poor within a marginalized status. Those in industry and governments wield and hold the balance of power in relationships of economics and they work to collectively sustain this effort; it is their job to ensure those who are in a marginalized state will not contribute to reform or environmental policy change.

Westra (2008) contends that the United States of America did not see environmental justice as a priority issue before 1990. In her discussion, she not only supports Bullard’s (2005, 1996, 1993) analysis of environmental racism, she provides a complex picture of eco-crime, corrupt governance, sketchy judiciary process and the oppression and dis-empowerment of Aboriginal peoples. Bullard (2005) and Gosine & Teelucksingh (2008) draw attention to people of colour and the *said* environmentalists who chose to ignore the impact of environmental toxic sites and the issues of human health risk. Immigrants, African, Mexican and Native Americans are often targeted populations.

During the early years, environmentalists defended their *objectivity* as non-racist and they attached their advocacy to other aspects of ecology. Additionally, many scholars have contributed to a counter discourse of environmental racism and to the diffusing of environmental racism. They focus their arguments on the realities of

economics and marketing, as the key factors in the contribution of earth demise, poverty, ill health and other forms of marginalization among specific groups of peoples (Been, 1994; Bender, 1995; Smith & Graham, 1997; Wigley & Shrader-Frechette, 1996).

These discourses have worked to undermine the research and scholarship of those who have been advancing environmental racism as a significant issue of oppression and one that impacts people of colour, women, immigrants and Indigenous peoples, and the significant reality of land or the *Earth Mother* as lifeblood. Currently, and in the past few years, resistance research and activism has garnered the support of minority groups, environmental and green parties, and Indigenous peoples in Canada and throughout the world.

American activist and scholar, Robert Bullard, often called the *father of environmental justice* has played a prevalent role in the advancing of the environmental racism discourse. As far back as the early 1980's he and Reverend Dr. Benjamin Chavis, one of the key organizers in the United States national movement for environmental justice (Dicum, 2006), have been supporters and front line activists in the resistance of environmental racism. Both he and Chavis ask some very important questions about environmental justice, racism, and power, as they assert environmental racism is an institutionalized phenomenon within our society.

One of the first historical actions against environmental racism took place in Afton, Warren County, North Carolina in 1987. The community of Afton was selected by the state of North Carolina as a toxic waste site for highly contaminated soil resulting from the deliberate dumping of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) contaminated oil by Ward Transfer Company. Despite organized protests, media coverage, and lobbying of

Congress to stop this site from opening in this community, activists and church officials, including Reverend Benjamin Chavis, found themselves in a lengthy battle.

Finally, after resisting many strategic and state delayed tactics, the community members of Afton laid criminal charges against Ward Transfer Company and the Robert J. Burns trucking company of Raleigh, North Carolina for their roles in contaminating the land of Warren County. Eventually through the resistance work of many peoples, the trucking company was found guilty of illegal discharging of “over 32,000 cubic yards of roadside soil” with PCBs within the ditches of 14 North Carolina counties; essentially they were guilty of contaminating in the community of Afton (Gosine & Teelucksingh, 2008, p. 2 citing Bullard, 2004). Although both Burns and Ward spent a short time in prison for this crime, years of investigation, lobbying and even litigation consumed the people of Afton. The Governor had promised a one-time only *dry tomb* waste landfill that was safe, however, many concerns existed regarding the procedures taken and the impact on neighbouring soil and ground water. As more than 60,000 tons of contaminated soil was buried within seven feet of ground water, several scientists disputed the safety of this venture.

A detoxification of the site was eventually court ordered and after decades of pressure, the citizens of Afton were vilified. They had won a long hard fight and through this they gained a place in history as the resilient “people of colour” activists. The detoxification work began immediately in June of 2001 and it was completed in the latter part of 2003. It is estimated the cost of this process, including studies, administration and clean up, consumed more than 17 million dollars (Gosine & Teelucksingh, 2008).

This case, used as a historical backstop for scholars investigating cases of environmental racism, clearly shows how environmental regulation is a racialized process. The environmental justice work done by this community of poor black activists—“84 percent of Afton residents were black and Warren County was the poorest community in the state”—has had resounding implications for activists, communities and researchers around the globe (Gosine & Teelucksingh, 2008, p. 2). The persistence of Bullard (2005, 1995, 1993) and Chavis (1987) was instrumental in providing both activists and scholars a justice framework *of the people and for the environment*.

This understanding of environmental racism has a deep south Americana history as “Benjamin Chavis is frequently cited as having coined the term *environmental racism*” (Gosine & Teelucksingh, p.4). Both he and Bullard are instrumental in the advancement of the term and its characteristics. In the late 1980s, the phenomenon became well known with the publication of *Toxic Waste and Race in the United States* (Chavis & Lee, 1987) and it has since become more commonly known as a form of racial discrimination found in environmental policymaking.

The kind of policymaking attached to environmental racism assures the deliberate placement and exposure of toxic and hazardous environmental conditions upon those living in “minority” communities. The environmental conditions that come with living in close proximity to hazardous waste sites, unsafe toxic landfills, and other harmful exposures have an adverse impact on the health and wellbeing of families within these communities. Insidiously filtered, this type of racism often excludes minorities from participating in agencies, forums, or organizations. Their voices are diminished and

sometimes erased from the process; there is often no debate, and so there is no voice to instigate change in laws and public policies.

Along with Chavis, other groups have added substance to the understanding of environmental racism. In 1999, the International Human Rights Law Group, which is a non-governmental organization, presented their case against environmental racism to the United Nations. This statement refers to “any government, institutional, or industry action, or failure to act, that has a negative environmental impact which disproportionately harms - whether intentionally or unintentionally - individuals, groups, or communities based on race or colour” (Harden, 1999, para 4). In this statement, Harden (1999) references how three of five African-Americans are living in communities with uncontrolled toxic waste sites and how “environmental hazards such as uranium mining are threatening the survival and culture of Native Americans” (Harden, 1999, para 8). At this meeting, this Law Group petitioned a commission by the *Special Rapporteur on Toxic Waste and Dumping* to investigate state activity found in Louisiana, New Mexico and Arizona.

Many legal scholars teaching environmental law use the foundational work of Reverend Dr. Benjamin Chavis to bring more reflection and historical understanding to their students. There is no doubt that his work and the impact it brings to the study of environmental justice is influential. Richard Lazarus (2002), professor of law from Georgetown University holds his contribution in high esteem and asserts he has contributed “one of the most influential ideas affecting modern environmental law’s evolution” along with the renowned ecologist Aldo Leopold (1949), and the classic work of *A Sand County Almanac* (Lazarus, 2002, p.273).

Although Bullard's analysis (2005, 1996, 1993) of environmental racism in the American south may be seen as an *Americanized* western framework, it provides a significant building block for Canadian environmental justice. Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008) assert that a justice framework dissecting the impact of environmental racism upon Aboriginal peoples and Canadian immigrants should utilize this lens to see what could be useful on Canadian soil.

Bullard's research (2005, 1996, 1993) frames environmental racism as a merging of civil rights and environmental rights within critical race theory. This merging is clarified as he shows how the siting of toxic waste sites are often positioned upon the lands of primarily African-Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans and people classified within lower class and socio-economic statuses. His analysis of *white privilege* is central to this discussion. United States has "long been grounded in white racism" and the American principles of "free land," "free labor" and "free men" (Bullard, 1996, p. 197) were won on the backs and lands of Indigenous peoples, (Native Americans), Mexicans and African Americans. He uses the scholarship of Blauner (1972) to introduce the reader to white privilege and five steps of colonization, which may be imposed upon people of colour:

they enter the host society and the economy involuntarily; their native culture is destroyed; white-dominated bureaucracies impose restrictions from which whites are exempt; the dominant group uses institutional racism to justify its actions; and a dual or split labor market emerges based on ethnicity and race (Bullard, 1996, p. 197).

In recent research, Bullard's analysis of *interest convergence* (2005) supports much of his understanding of environmental racism. Interest convergence been applied to many distinct peoples through their marginalization by the dominant, white, patriarchal, heterosexual, able-bodied society:

Legislative initiatives often serve the people who create them rather than those who need protections or services. Derrick Bell (2004), a black scholar and legal analyst, coined the term *interest convergence* to describe the benefits afforded to dominant groups through legal sanctions. Although civil rights legislation assured the rights of access for black Americans to publicly funded services and spaces such as education and public schools, it predominantly assured the protections of white interests attached to employment, social status, and political power (Kress-White, 2009, p. 65-66).

Bullard's actions were and still remain instrumental in advancing equality rights as a necessary framework within the environmental justice movement. He and others, along with Revered Chavis who headed up the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice, organized the *First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit* in 1991. Since that time, more than 300 groups of interested parties have contributed to the discourse around environmental racism and justice.

A collective of environmental advocates developed the "*Principles of Environmental Justice*¹", a document that is referenced in today's pursuit of justice by Aboriginal peoples (Thomas-Muller, 2010). One of Bullard's significant contributions to this endeavour is the scholarship he provided in *Confronting Environmental Racism*:

¹ See Appendix F: Principles of Environmental Justice

Voices from the Grassroots (1993). He compels others to search for the truth. In this pursuit, he is talking about dismantling history, slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism by ensuring educators, researchers, and activists understand that although today's environmental policies are shown to be "race-neutral", they, in fact, are highly racist as their developments continue to be influenced by a euro-centric and racist history, and the hegemony of privilege.

Along with Cole and Foster (2001), Bullard (1993) ensures the reader understands environmental policy development and actions taken by governments are indeed racist, and that the idea of "race neutrality" within these institutions is a fallacy. Cole and Foster (2001) explain the intricacies of land value and historical notions of racism as tied to environmental degradation and environmental racism. They use the example of how Los Angeles was settled and compare the settling of the San Fernando Valley to that of an identical geographical land base in South Central Los Angeles to show how people will pay a premium to live in all white neighborhoods, and how determinants for land use usually come after the settling, and the privileging of the white settler and not before:

Race potentially plays a factor in almost every "neutral" [waste facility] sitting criterion used. Cheap land values are understandably, a key sitting criteria for the waste industry and other developers. However, because of historical segregation and racism, land values in the United States are integrally tied to race. The land value cycle is vicious too: once a neighborhood becomes host to industry, land values typically fall thus, a community that initially has low land values because it is home to people of colour becomes a community that has low land

values because it has a preponderance of industry, which in turn attracts more industry, creating a cumulative effect on land values (Cole and Foster, p.72).

Environmental racism, deeply embedded within the policy of modern day America, often presents a *hidden agenda* concealed in economic rationalizations:

Environmental racism both in North America and elsewhere, is the practice of viewing minority communities as a means to the majorities' ends, and of burdening the disempowered with what no one else is prepared to accept, or to further the economic success of some at the expense of the weak, the poor and the disempowered (Westra, 1996, p.63).

The targeted, the weak, the poor, the disempowered, those experiencing environmental racism, often live in communities where industry exploits and desecrates their land, air and water. In another American analysis, Cole and Foster (2001) critique the argument of deteriorating environmental changes in neighbourhoods as being purely market driven by showing the true history of government settlement patterns and how these favoured the white settler through the segregation policy of the day. They believe this adherence to market driven environmental discourse helps naturalize and even diminish the underlying racism embedded in determinants producing the valuation of land. Today's zoning bylaws, the placement of major transportation route developments, and creation of low population density areas which were historically and forcibly settled in by African Americans, are only three examples of planning action that continue to discriminate against people of colour (Cole & Foster, 2001).

Today's laws and policies *of the environment* often translate into the "sitting of waste facilities" and other degrading development. In addition to "waste facility sitting",

environmental racism can be linked to current needs within agricultural and tourism related economies for cheap and expendable labour (made up of African Americans and Latino workers) (Bullard, 1993, 2005). Examples of mistreatment and abuse of migrant, African-American, Mexican, and Native American peoples as cheap expendable labourers, those who will “do the work” in hazardous work environments or on lands considered toxic, can be found in industry, manufacturing, mining, agriculture and forestry. These infractions are not immune to the United States. The governments of Canada, historically, have exploited Indigenous labourers and Indigenous lands, and they continue to do so globally.

Bullard’s (2005) dedication to the scholarship of environmental racism is also found in the *Quest for Environmental Justice: human rights and the politics of pollution*. In this contribution he has pulled from a wealth of activists, environmentalists, and women of colour. He believes that *environmental racism is real*, as real as the racism found in the discriminatory policies and actions of educational institutions, housing authorities, judiciary processes, and employment practices. In many cases, the impact of environmental racism is infused within the above aspects of discriminatory practice. *Business as usual* contributes to the hegemony associated with environmental racism in industry and government. The seeping of this economic hegemony into professional fields of law, education, and recreation studies (only three of many) makes the practice of environmental degradation through resource management and its spin off of equitable employment appear normal. Through his definition, Bullard (2005) explains the complexities of this phenomenon:

Environmental racism refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities because of their race or color. Environmental racism in public policies and industry practices results in benefits being provided to whites and costs being shifted to people of color. Environmental racism is reinforced by government, legal, economic, political and military institutions (Bullard, 2005, p.32).

Cole and Foster's (2001) scholarship define the issues around Indigenous environmentalism and show how several social movements have entwined their strategies to project what is now known as environmental justice. That being said, it seems that even organizations that profess to advocate for environmental justice must sustain critique as most recently the World Wildlife Association, Greenpeace, and others have been drawn into this discourse for seemingly hegemonic policy (Thomas-Mueller, 2011). Cole and Foster (2001) draw our attention to issues that are associated with political and economic struggle. In their view, if one is to have a clear understanding of environmental racism, one must begin to conceptualize a framework that

- 1) retains a structural view of economic and social forces as they influence discriminatory outcome,
- 2) isolates the dynamics within environmental decision-making processes that further contribute to such outcomes
- 3) normatively evaluates social forces and environmental decision-making processes which contribute to disparities in environmental hazard distribution (Cole & Foster, 2001, p.65).

In 2008, the International Indian Treaty Council began its work on re-defining the realities of environmental racism. It currently uses the below definition to enable the critique of industry, government and corporations, as it simultaneously defends Indigenous ways of knowing and the right to self-determination for all Indigenous peoples. This advancement attests environmental racism not only destroys bio-diversity and ecosystems globally, it also acts as a contributor to the social, cultural and spiritual demise of Indigenous identities and the well-being of all Indigenous peoples. It is defined as the

implementation of environmental, natural resource, and development schemes that nullify or impair the enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous Peoples. This new form of environmental discrimination is an assault on Indigenous Peoples' human rights and public health including their right to their unique special social, cultural, spiritual and historical life ways and worldviews. Environmental racism results in the devastation, contamination, dispossession, loss or denial of access to Indigenous peoples' biodiversity, their waters, and traditional lands and territories. Environmental racism is now the primary cause of human health effects of Indigenous Peoples and the forced separation and removal of Indigenous Peoples from their lands and territories, their major means of subsistence, their language culture and spirituality all of which are derived from their cultural, physical and spiritual relationship to their land (International Indian Treaty Council, 2008, para 6).

Environmental racism is presented as a form of structural racism that "sanctions the stripping and toxification of Indigenous lands and the damaging of Indigenous peoples'

health” (Weinberg, 2010, para 4) and Canada has a long history of infractions that both strip and poison the spirits of Aboriginal peoples and their traditional lands.

In White’s analysis (2011), he explores environmental crime and the role of the perpetrator as he accounts environmental racism as one of the factors that rests within the framework of eco-crime. By exploring the work of both Westra (2008) and Williams (1996), one can envision how generations of Indigenous peoples have been fraught with the reality of racism, poverty, and genocide along with the destruction of traditional and ancestral lands.

According to Williams (1996) the term environmental victim represents the idea of injury caused by a deliberate or reckless act or omission. Environmental victims are:

... those of past, present, or future generations who are injured as a consequence of change to chemical, physical, microbiological, or psychosocial environment, brought about by the deliberate or reckless, individual or collective, human act or act of omission (White, 2011, p. 109 citing Williams, 1996).

The western definitions of environmental racism, however, do not account for the spiritual relationship of Indigenous peoples with their lands and the consequential demise of these relationships found within the destruction of land, water and life entities.

Mainstream environmentalists have not referenced the significance of spirituality tied to ancestral lands, the cultures of peoples and the very lifeblood of relationality—the interdependence of the human with all other earth entities—in the understanding of eco-victimization. With the exception of the International Indian Treaty Council, and the research of Laura Westra (1995), Janice Weaver (1996), Winona LaDuke (1999) and

Ward Churchill (1999), the discourses of Indigenous knowledge are missing from much of the earlier western analysis on environmental racism.

Canadian History, Globalization and Environmental Racism

...the forestry regime and the industry it serves are causing havoc with our way of life, seriously harming the environment and ignoring our constitutional rights.

Things simply cannot continue as they have...

There must be dramatic and immediate change.

The boreal forest is in peril. Our way of life is threatened.

Romeo Saganash, Grand Council of the Cree

Indigenous environmentalism has had a long history of activism throughout the colonized world. Unfortunately in Canada, Indigenous activism and the critique of environmental racism and even colonialism is often dismissed as inconsequential and non-existent (Gosine & Teelucksingh, 2008; Dearing citing Harper's Statement, 2009).

Neo-colonialism, using both the discourses found in neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, advances this dismissal (Apple, 2004). While neo-liberalism relies on discourses that present positive conceptions of what the government is doing to reach equality measures, neo-conservatism advances pressure to regulate the content and behaviors of memberships found in diverse societies (Apple, 2004). Both can be tied to western ideologies of land management, institutional policy development, and the market economy. Persons referencing the actions of governments or industries as those that take into account the *best interests* of Aboriginal peoples contribute to the deflection of environmental racism; those in power often use the argument of economic mismanagement or inability by First Nations peoples to manage their own affairs to distract from the realities of coercive treaty negotiations and stalemated Indigenous governance in relationship to land and community demise. The anti-racist research of

several scholars cite deflectors as referencing Indigenous peoples as “inherently inferior and incapable of governing themselves,” (Henry, Tator, Mattis & Rees, 2000, p.119).

In an opposite view, this deflection is further described by Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008) as they argue the legislative parameters within the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) and the *Canadian Multicultural Act* (1988) work together to portray an imagined and also a sometimes positive image of engaged urban and wilderness existences for immigrants, refugees and Aboriginal peoples. These romanticized outlooks confuse Canadians and create inaccurate Canadian perceptions. However, unlike the formidable and racist Canadian *Indian Act* which has been critiqued as antiquated, oppressive and the most racist piece of legislature on earth (Gabriel, 2009; Atleo, 2012), these legislative constructs sometimes instigate positive steps toward distributive or transformative justice. That being said, the legislation of many statutes continues to deter Aboriginal Canadians from self-determination.

A recent critique by the Native Women’s Association of Canada, one among many Aboriginal Councils, shows how Canada’s opposition to the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* signifies the destructive nature of legal wrangling, precedent setting justifications, and interest convergence (Bullard, 2005; Gosine and Teelucksingh, 2008; Shunpiking, 2007). Within the institutions of government and industry, the blatant structural racism that was brought to Aboriginal peoples through the residential school era continues.

Currently, the proposed *Canadian Environmental Bill of Rights*, presented as a private member’s bill, is a piece of model legislation built upon current provincial and

territorial acts. That being said, critics believe environmental statutes² currently existing in Canada have done little to protect or enhance environmental rights, a green economy, or cultural lifestyles of Aboriginal Canadians. To add fuel to this critique, there is no specific provision within the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that allows Canadians to seek an injunction to stop unauthorized activity harmful to the environment and the kinships of that environment. The provinces of Ontario and Quebec sanction whistle blower actions and give allowances for environmental injunctions, however, in the most precarious of lands, that being the lands of northern Alberta within the First Nations territories recognized under *Treaty 8*, there is a void of provincial legislation. The proposed federal environmental protection bill, *Bill C-469* does recognize Canadian Treaty Rights as a grounding force within an eco-justice framework, however, since it was introduced as a private members bill in March of 2011, it has not passed the required readings to become Canadian law. As known, private member's bills rarely pass into legislation.

Realism signifies a lengthy fight and the protection of actions for those who continue to exploit and pollute Aboriginal lands. Without a national piece of legislation, there is little accountability for state or corporate withdrawal from traditional territories or from extrapolations such as those found in the tar sands campaign.

The significance of “free-wheeling” by both state and corporation to push forward the “dirty oil economy” was best defined by Winona LaDuke (2011b) as she recently spoke to delegates in Portland, Oregon about the Long Haul destruction of oil from the tar sands of Alberta through the United States and parts of Canada. She referenced the

² Ontario Environmental Bill of Rights, the Yukon Environment Act, the Northwest Territories Environmental Rights Act, and Quebec's Environmental Quality Act

resistance of environmental activists and Indigenous peoples against the tar sands expansion and the Enbridge and Gateway proposed pipeline campaigns “like fighting a hydra. Cut off one head and another appears. It’s amorphous, it shifts, it has an immense amount of power. It’s unclear and it's got a lot of fronts” (LaDuke, 2011b). As she spoke of the longevity of her personal campaign for Indigenous peoples, she prepared delegates for a lengthy fight.

It is clear the actions (or non-actions) of the Government of Canada have been detrimental to all Aboriginal peoples. Activists refer to the current pieces of environmental legislation as *smoke and mirrors* as these acts rarely protect the interests of Aboriginal Canadians. Secondly, although the Government of Canada has indicated interest, in a signatory way, to protect the fundamental freedoms of Aboriginal peoples, this government along with all western governments has dismissed the relevance of the *Universal Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights* (2007). The previous Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), Chuck Strahl, described the declaration as “unworkable in a Western democracy under a constitutional government” (CanWest Media Works Publications Inc., 2007, para 7) and he elaborated in saying

In Canada, you are balancing individual rights vs. collective rights, and (this) document ... has none of that. By signing on, you default to this document by saying that the only rights in play here are the rights of the First Nations. And, of course, in Canada, that's inconsistent with our constitution (Montreal Gazette, 2007, para 3).

In Canada ... you negotiate on this ... because (native rights) don't trump all other rights in the country. You need also to consider the people who have sometimes

also lived on those lands for two or three hundred years, and have hunted and fished alongside the First Nations (Montreal Gazette, 2007, para 9).

Although Canada officially endorsed the declaration through signature on November 12, 2010, much work remains to be done to ensure the rights and freedoms of Aboriginal peoples.

Of significance to Canada's position on the environment is *Article 29 within the Universal Declaration of Indigenous Peoples Rights*. This article defines rights associated with conservation and protection of traditional lands, the assurance that no storage or disposal of hazardous waste shall take place on territories without free, prior and informed consent and that programs to monitor and restore the health of the environment and Indigenous peoples are in place. Although *Article 29* is critical to the environmental well being of Indigenous peoples, it cannot stand-alone. As know, the worldview and holistic nature of Indigenous knowledge, kinship, culture and spirituality cannot be separated and addressed as one part. Collectively, this declaration addresses the human rights of Indigenous peoples and their significant relationship with *Mother Earth* and her entities.

The *Universal Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Rights* is not a legally binding instrument and many of the *Articles* within the declaration remain to be explored. Again, the Government of Canada falls short in the protection of its most vulnerable citizens, the Aboriginal peoples of Canada, as it hesitates to ethically negotiate the ratification of a global treaty defending the fundamental rights of its citizens.

In framing the importance of the *Universal Declaration of Indigenous Peoples' Rights* for all Aboriginal peoples and Canadian citizens, one must understand the history

of colonization, the coming of the white settler, the implementation and destructive outcome of the *Indian Act* among Aboriginal kinships. The complexities of these historical abuses including the stealing and exploitation of ancestral lands, the historical and current restrictions of reserves, the forced relocations of Aboriginal peoples from traditional territories, the residential school abuses, the transference of disease, the appropriations of traditional knowledges, particularly of medicines, and the multitude of traumas experienced through cultural genocide and imperialism from the state and church continue to be dismissed by those of dominance (Battiste, 2008, p.8).

The position of this review frames this continued colonization through specific human actions found within the categorization of environmental racism. Although some Canadian and international legal frameworks including those supporting land treaty negotiations have served Aboriginal peoples, much more progress is required to unearth and address current social, environmental and economic situations on the reserves throughout Canada.

Resistance to an Indigenous worldview is commonplace in our society, while reality shows contemporary forms of colonization play out in the far north of our country and on the streets of urban Canada. Although this review will not define all of that history, a slice of it will be explored to show the protection of colonized structures and systems, as well as racist and white settler ideologies which continue to impact Aboriginal peoples. In the past 30 years grassroots Indigenous environmental activists have brought the phenomenon of environmental racism to the forefront.

The Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) began at Lori Goodman's kitchen table in the small isolated Navajo town of Dilkon, Arizona. With her impetus, a small

group of Indigenous activists fought against the toxic waste incinerator to be situated on this Navajo reservation. In their win against Waste-Tech, this small group of warriors set the table for the broad based Indigenous environmental network that exists today.

Goodman and her following created what is known as Citizens Against Ruining Our Environment (CARE) and began the connection of many tribal groups and supporters throughout North America (Cole & Foster, 2001). In 1990, this group connected with the Greenpeace and the Seventh Generation Fund to organize a gathering billed as “Protecting Mother Earth Conference” (Cole & Foster, 2001, p. 139). The following year, a second gathering was held at Bear Butte, South Dakota, and with key activists pushing for solidification, the *Indigenous Environmental Network* (IEN) was born. This grassroots alliance of Indigenous peoples is a collaborative whose mission is to protect the “sacredness of Mother Earth from contamination and exploitation by strengthening, maintaining and respecting its traditional teachings and natural laws” (Mission Statement, IEN, 2011).

IEN’s head office is situated in Minnesota, USA and is staffed with a small group of Indigenous environmentalists, activists and researchers. Clayton Thomas-Muller heads the Canadian field office in Ottawa, Canada. He is an outspoken Cree activist whose work transfers to both Indigenous peoples and critical environmentalists alike. He was thrust into the environmental movement and through this baptism by fire, he began to see how closely connected the issues of environment justice and Indigenous justice are.

Thomas-Muller’s experiences as social justice worker on the streets of Winnipeg have served him well as he maneuvers among First Nations, the Métis and the Inuit, as well as tribal groups defined as those who are North American Indians. He has a level of

comfort with government officials, scientists, and corporate players alike, and he has boldly sought ally-ship with like-minded Aboriginal peoples, environmentalists, politicians, journalists, activists, and other world leaders as he shares his leadership locally, nationally and internationally.

He references the 17 principles of the *National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit* held in 1991 as those that define and ground the work of the Indigenous Environmental Network. His view of Canadian contemporary environmental activism is disturbing. He uses the words of *amnesia* and *co-opting* to describe current Canadian culture and the individuals and organizations engaged in mainstream environmentalism. His analysis, defended by the scholarship of Gosine and Teelucksingh (2008), shows the disregard of environmental destruction and its counter-product, environmental racism, by those leading the environmental movement in Canada. Thomas-Muller's push to shut down the tar sands is second to none. In a recent interview, he cites the growth of the Aboriginal population in Canada and the reaching out to labour unions and labourers as important to the movement of protecting *Mother Earth*:

A lot of my work here in Canada has been focused recently on reaching out to labour. I see a lot of long-term strategic benefits for social movements in this country if the Indigenous struggle for environmental justice and the labour struggle can unite. If you look at the demographics, by 2016 one out of every fourteen workers in Canada will be native. Three quarters of native people are under the age of 30. The face of entire regions of this country is going to change in the coming years. There is going to be a pretty fundamental shift in the labour

market, and in political and economic power. So in that context there's a lot to be said about the need for the labour struggle and the Indigenous struggle to come together to push for systematic change around a new and renewable energy economy (Thomas-Muller, 2009, para 23).

Although the work of Thomas-Muller is instrumental in the fight to expose environmental racism in Canada, his most challenging job in this advocacy will be forging an understanding of eco-wellness and green economy with those who work as labourers. As known, one of the great counter tactics of corporations and governments is the "classic jobs-for-environment tradeoff" (Cole & Foster, 200, p.48). Bullard (1993) defines this tactic as "job blackmail" (Bullard, 1993, p.23); the promise of jobs often clouds the motivations of Aboriginal peoples (and numerous groups of others) to protect and honour the land:

Workers of color are especially vulnerable to job blackmail because of their concentration in low-paying, unskilled, nonunionized occupations they make up a large share of the nonunion contract workers in the oil, chemical, and nuclear industries Fear of unemployment acts as a potent incentive (Bullard, 1993, p.23).

This reference to "job blackmail" (Bullard, 1993, p.23) can be attached to the nuclear and hydro industries throughout Canada, and particularly in Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec (Martin & Hoffman, 2009). Many Aboriginal communities have conceded to development in exchange for jobs that have never transpired (MiningWatch Canada, 2011). In our country, it is well known that racism prevails in government, industry and educational institutions alike (Razack, 2002), and in every instance of

northern industrial development, the white settler benefits at a greater level (Bell, 1994; Regan, 2010).

There is no doubt Thomas-Muller's efforts have elevated the environmental justice movement in Canada. He and others of the IEN provide a critique that challenges mainstream environmental ideologies as justice. The cultural and spiritual depth of Thomas-Muller's position supports Indigenous peoples working in local communities and boardrooms around the globe and his commitment to addressing climate change and fighting for climate and energy justice has been deepened by his recent founding of Defenders of the Land, a forum for land-based First Nations struggles. Nina Winham (2007) presents his position:

“The western scientific industrial experiment of the last 150 years is psychotic,” he says with no hint of sarcasm. “In this day where the last pristine wilderness is under threat, where we have psychotic, suicidal, homicidal corporate interests—mining, industrial fishing, oil and gas—what we're seeing playing out across Mother Earth is a last stand of 350 million Indigenous people left. Those 350 million represent 87 per cent of all languages and cultural diversity on the planet. Biodiversity and cultural diversity are inextricably linked: within that cultural diversity are highly sophisticated systems of ecosystem management developed over millennia as part of the system—the circle of life, biodiversity, whatever you want to call it. Every time an Indigenous language is lost it's like the burning of the library at Alexandria. We lose a deep understanding of ecology of that one part of Mother Earth. What we're seeing is genocide unparalleled in

the history of the earth, to replace this diversity with commodification”

(Winham, 2007 citing Thomas-Muller, para 9-10).

Although Thomas-Muller acknowledges “Canada’s rapidly changing legal landscape and [how] the emergence of precedent-setting cases around the duty to consult with First Nations—the Haida Gwaii decision, the Delgamuukw decision, the Grassy Narrows decision” has had a positive impact on the mobilization of the Indigenous environmental movement (Welsh, 2011, para 10), he pushes to expose the hegemony of the current tar sands debate through a lens of geo-political education. Not a small task in a world of capitalistic consumerism. In doing this, he not only shows the physical destruction and the diminishment of human and biological health impacted by the tar sands, he compares and dissects Canadian and US foreign policy and discourses of Middle Eastern history to examine similar trajectories: “you’ll see that the violence in the Middle East, and the profitability of the Canadian Tar Sands follow a path that is almost identical. It’s the same thing with the health situation playing out in frontline communities in terms of cancer rates going up” (Welsh citing Thomas-Muller, 2010, para 18).

Most recently, Thomas-Muller’s staunch opposition to the tar sands has been fueled by the work of Winona LaDuke (2011a, 2011b). LaDuke defines the tar sands as the largest, most wasteful, and most toxic industrial project in the history of mankind. She speaks of this project encompassing a land mass larger than Lake Superior, the turning of the Athabasca River system into a cesspool, the excessive waste of fresh water necessary for bitumen extraction, and the pollution: “they burn more than 600 million cubic feet of natural gas to produce tar sands daily ... use enough natural gas to

heat 300 million homes ... the CO₂ omissions exceed those of 97 nations ... they use clean fuel, natural gas, to make the dirtiest...” (LaDuke, 2011b). LaDuke does not have a solution for the Cree, the Denesuline and the Métis who currently suffer the greatest environmental health fallout from the tar sands, however, she does point to governments bureaucrats as those who precipitate confusion regarding authentic environmental public policy.

Government and corporate propagandas including expensive television and internet advertisements shield the public from knowing the truth; sadly this propaganda perpetuates the personal consumption choices of both Canadians and Americans. She believes that North Americans must recognize it is simply a matter of reduction and the grasping of foresight and will to consume less. Currently, levels of public understanding show significant apathy: “when it’s out of sight, it’s out mind, right? So people do not see what is happening and they think it’s not in my backyard and by the way I want gas for my tank!” (LaDuke, 2011b).

In the past twenty-five years, Canadians have witnessed many forms of environmental racism, encompassed by the significant actions of governments and corporations in resisting Aboriginal worldviews. As Indigenous worldviews collide with those of western ideologies, there exists a great divide on how western and Aboriginal interests and understandings of the land should merge. A critical understanding of eco-justice acknowledges an Indigenous worldview and traditional ecological knowledges (TEK) as foundational to self-determination and wellness among Aboriginal and Indigenous peoples. I have chosen three significant Canadian cases of environmental racism to signify the disregard of Aboriginal identity and wellness. The tensions and

realities of the peoples and communities embroiled in the Alberta Tar Sands, the Oka crisis and the Grassy Narrows demise show ways in which environmental racism and ecological destruction have contributed to illness, poverty and cultural genocide among Indigenous peoples. Additionally, the following section of the paper will bring attention to several other instances of environmental racism, both historical and current, that implicate the living realities of Aboriginal peoples in the prairie provinces of Canada.

Appropriation and Exploitation: Assault upon Mother Earth and her peoples

Earth as mother.

*My brother's deaths - all these diseases like AIDS -
are just a reflection of what we're doing to the Earth,
of what we're doing to women.*

We must restore the balance or reap the consequences.

*In Kiss of the Fur Queen, I try to restore the goddess to her rightful place.
It's the only way I can make a contribution to change.*

Tomson Highway

The Tar Sands: Who Owns the Oil? Man or Earth Mother?

The largest industrial project on earth, the Tar Sands of Alberta and its proposed pipeline expansion, is centered in the heartland of Alberta's boreal forest. The landmass of the tar sands has been compared to Lake Superior, the state of Florida, or the country of England and it has been cited as an "end to end environmental degradation" and the "greatest form of moral carelessness" (Sustainable Guidance, Tar Sands Oil Extraction - The Dirty Truth, 2011). Its noted destruction has been labeled an eco-crime and it is project that plunders the Earth and displaces its inhabitants in a "colonial legacy of pillage and militarization" (Coast Salish Territories, 2009, para 7) as it justifies the "commodification of land, water, energy, food and air in a capitalistic economy" (Coast Salish Territories, 2009, para 7). The implications to the Cree, Métis and Denesuline

Nations living within the traditional lands of *Treaty 8* are immense. Without visuals, one can only imagine the destruction of the land consumed in this project. I will attempt to do that with the stories of the people who live and work within this territory and those who are their allies.

The community of Fort Chipewyan bears the most burden in this act of genocide, however, the residents here are not the only victims of eco-crime. Fort Chipewyan is situated only miles away from the tar sands, downstream from seven tar sands plants. When shown an aerial view, one can see vast amounts of ‘dead space’ where great stands of the Boreal forest once stood—there is no other way to describe the desecration found within the tar sands project. The water that is used, four barrels of ground water to produce one barrel of crude oil, is lost in a toxic stew that is filtered back into the earth. The largest tailing pond “contains 540 million cubic meters of poison waste water, making it the largest dam on earth” (Arsenault citing the U.S. Department of the Interior, 2008, para 19) and collectively, these toxic lakes are said to span 50 square kilometers and are visible from space. Whole flocks of wild fowl and other birds have died here. Although Syncrude, one of the largest oil producing companies, professes it is able to reclaim tailings water, Simon Dyer from the Pembina Institute opposes this view (Arsenault, 2008, para 22) as does Andrew Nikiforuk (2008). “According to peer-reviewed scientific articles written by Dr. David Schindler, Killam Memorial Chair and Professor of Ecology at the University of Alberta, the whole province and neighbouring regions will soon face ‘a crisis in water quantity and quality with far-reaching implications’.” (Arsenault, 2008, para 17).

The water system of the Athabasca River (part of the world's third largest watershed) and the tributaries leaving it are now in a precarious position: "Tar sands producers extract 2.5 million barrels of water per day from the Athabasca River" (Arsenault, 2008, para 17). Great numbers of concerned citizens from the four western provinces, and the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut come together each year at *Keepers of the Waters* to work together in solidarity to protect the Athabasca watershed, as this water system is the lifeblood of many Aboriginal peoples, and in particular, the peoples of the Denesuline Nation.

In addition to water concerns, the production necessary for extraction of bitumen into oil produces five times more greenhouse gas than any other form of oil extraction and currently, more than 4.3 million hectares of the Boreal forest are under siege (Greenpeace Canada). The tar sands are carried by massive dump trucks; the Caterpillar 797B is the world's largest truck and it is in motion 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The tires on these trucks are more than twice the height of most humans and they alone cost \$40,000 each (Arsenault, 2008). One can only imagine the desecration caused by the necessity of "roads" for this form of transportation, or the depth of the craters that have moved into the boreal peat lands. It is very unlikely this area of forest will ever be rehabilitated although the incessant media campaigns always show a reclaimed green space (Gass, 2009). Although the Government of Alberta showcases Gateway Hill as a parcel of reclaimed tar sands land, Simon Dyer challenges this as he has shown the area is "'just topsoil that was stripped away' in previous decades. Over the long term, Dyer says the companies have to incorporate poison tailings into a dry landscape, and they

have not proven their ability to do so” (Arsenault, 2008, para 24). The environmental impact of the tar sands is second to none as there are:

Irreversible effects on biodiversity and the natural environment, reduced water quality, destruction of fragile pristine Boreal Forest and associated wetlands, aquatic and watershed mismanagement, habitat fragmentation, habitat loss, disruption to life cycles of endemic wildlife, particularly bird and caribou migration, fish deformities and negative impacts on the human health in downstream communities (Hansen, 2011, para 1).

In a community of 1200 peoples, the Cree, Métis and Denesuline populations of Fort Chipewyan have cancer rates and other disorders that are statistically beyond all Canadian communities and populations (Gass, 2009). As scientists, physicians, labourers and the children and Elders of Fort Chipewyan relay stories of ill health and demise of their human population, their eco-systems and all the living entities within the region, government and industry propagandas and actions of those in power forge a constant attack of rebuttal, dismissal, and discrediting against these voices. Physicians and laborers alike have been shut down through job loss and legal action from energy companies and governments.

Although there are Aboriginal companies that benefit from contract work with oil sands companies, most Aboriginal peoples are not receiving these benefits. In 2009, only 1600 Aboriginal peoples were employed in permanent positions within the massive human resource of 70,000 people needed to operate the tar sands (Government of Canada, 2009). In 2010, the number of Aboriginal peoples employed with tar sands rose to 1700 while the Fort McKay Group of Companies also employed 500 Aboriginal

workers (Government of Alberta, 2011). While governments and corporations espouse they are employing many First Nations and Métis peoples and they are concerned about their economic and social welfare, this is a fallacy. It is know more than 30,000 Aboriginal peoples live in the tar sands region and most live in poverty.

Deborah Gibson (2007), a researcher at the Edmonton based Parkland Institute, reports that more than half the wealth generated by the tar sands flows out of Canada to foreign shareholders and of the wealth remaining, most goes to the richest of Canadian families. Another Gibson report (2010) notes “lone parents, Aboriginal families and newcomers in Alberta live in deeper and a more persistent state of poverty than in any other province in Canada” (Dillon, 2011, p. 12 citing Gibson, 2010, p. 29). More than 64% of single-parent families headed by women and 54% of Aboriginal peoples live in poverty (Dillon, 2011). There are more worrisome realities for the peoples of this province:

Food bank usage rose 45 percent between 1997 and 2009. Alberta has the highest rates of family violence in the country. Albertans rank lowest in Canada for their sense of belonging to their community. Alberta has the lowest participation in university education. Albertans have by far the lowest leisure time in the nation. Increasingly, jobs have become temporary or part-time or self-employment while average wages have barely kept up with inflation. Past tar sands expansion booms have led to temporary labour shortages. In order to overcome them, the federal government devised programs to bring in temporary workers from countries such as Mexico, China and the Philippines (Dillon, 2011, p.12). In addition to Aboriginal peoples experiencing this insidious form of racism and

the outcomes that prevail for themselves and other earth creatures, foreign workers from China, the Philippines and Mexico have also experienced eco-crime. Most are non-union and temporary employees with poor safety protections or benefit plans. Recently 53 charges have been laid against the Canadian Natural Resources Horizon (CNRH) project when two foreign workers died and four others were badly injured. Many foreign companies and their workers have abysmal records of safety; knowing this CNRH chose to subcontract a Chinese construction company and in this case, it is likely Canadian standards may not have been followed. Alberta Occupation Health and Safety (AOHS) has two years to investigate and file charges in cases of this nature. One might ask why it took AOHS almost two years to notify CNRH, incidentally only three days before the deadline.

The discrimination found against imported workers is complex: “unscrupulous recruiting agencies charging exorbitant fees, sub- standard living conditions, threat of deportation and lack of support for people who often do not understand their rights under these programs and have difficulty communicating their needs, given language and cultural barriers” (Dillon, 2011, p.12). These workers have no access to government services, no guarantees of continued work, and moreover, they are “nickeled and dimed” by employers. The Alberta Federation of Labour has investigated numerous cases of abuse: “If you are an employer and you can hire a worker where you can get half of the wages back on rent, that’s a bonus . . . There are guys that come here, work here for six months, then go home without having earned a penny” (Dillon, 2011, p.12). In this example, it is evident current Canadian labour standards do not apply to workers from China. The correlation of discrimination against people of colour stands strong.

Two Aboriginal activists, Mike Mercredi and George Poitras, are relentless as they work to expose companies like Syncrude, Suncor Energy, and Imperial Oil. Mercredi often tells the story of how he initially worked for Syncrude in Fort McMurray, Alberta but when his kinship began to die—an aunt, uncle and close friend—he quit and began the fight to show the world the reality of what was happening to the people of Fort Chipewyan. “We were indoctrinated to believe that [oil extraction] was progress, that the world was going to benefit,” said Mercredi. “The whole time, I just sat in my truck and watched them tear up the land.” (Gass, 2009, para 12).

Mercredi talked about how the tar sands have contaminated the water around Fort Chipewyan, leading to 47 cases – six in one year – of a rare form of cancer that is usually only contracted by one in 100,000. He also used the term “environmental racism” to describe the impact of tar sands, because while the ratio would be considered an epidemic in Montreal, but it is largely ignored in Fort Chipewyan. “There is genocide happening right now in our country,” he said. “Our graveyards are getting full.” (Gass, 2009, para 14-15).

George Poitras, the former Chief of the Mikisew Cree First Nation, recently spoke to students at the University of McGill. In his presentation, *Life and Death Downstream from the Tar Sands* on March 17, 2011, Poitras laid out the history of the tar sands from its inception 30 years ago to the current day realities, the correlations of ill health, specifically high rates of cancer, and the hegemonic positioning of both governments and corporations against the Cree, Métis and Dene peoples of Fort Chipewyan, Alberta: “5 years ago people would use the water and not be concerned. Today no one will drink the

water and many people still consume a traditional diet but they cannot” (Bourgeois, 2011).

More than five years ago in the spring of 2006, both Alberta Health and Health Canada were informed of the higher incidences of a rare cancer, cancer of the bile, linked to the petroleum industry. Rather than supporting the community physician making these claims, the provincial and federal health authorities charged him with “causing undue alarm” and continue to ignore the voices of residents although they have proven levels of metals like mercury, arsenic and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in our waters and sediment are abnormally high. Combined, these metals are known carcinogens that cause the type of rare cancers found in our community. But the government and oil companies continue to dismiss these claims, despite the rigorous scientific methods employed (Poitras, 2009, para 6-7).

Since that time, George Poitras has worked as a tireless advocate for the community of Fort Chipewyan and has fought hegemony and propaganda from the governments of Fort McMurray, Alberta, and Canada. Although community members have been ignored and harassed, through the leadership of George Poitras, many international and national advocates have come on board. These range from students to filmmakers and producers, environmentalists and scientists.

Among the noted is the University of Alberta students’ group, *I Stand For Fort Chip*, and filmmakers producing *Downstream*, *Dirty Oil*, *H2Oil*, and *Avatar*. James Cameron, producer and director of *Avatar* is a well-known advocate of Indigenous peoples around the globe. The fine investigative science of Dr. Kevin Timoney, Dr. John O’Connor, and Dr. Schindler have helped the community of Fort Chipewyan piece

together a history of human rights abuse, treaty and traditional land infringements, and diminished health and wellness (Poitras, 2011). It is this and the personal stories of dying youth that propel these advocates to take legal action against the governments of Alberta and Canada so a moratorium on the approval of new and existing tar sands projects will be in place until scientists and traditional ecological keepers of knowledge have the opportunity to properly assess the environmental and health issues of the community (Bourgeois, 2011). These resistances are just the beginning of a public cry for the necessary allyship that is required to protect traditional lands and the sustainability of Aboriginal peoples. In a counter-campaign, the oil industry and the governments of Canada and Alberta have been cited as spending in excess of twenty five million dollars in an Oil Sands public relations campaign this past year (Sustainable Guidance, Tar Sands Oil extraction - The Dirty Truth, 2011).

The Oka Crisis: Of Leisure, Stolen Land and Two Worldviews

Many Canadians remember the Oka Crisis and, in particular, the poignant photograph of the nose-to-nose face off between Private Patrick Cloutier and Brad “Freddy Krueger” Larocque, a University of Saskatchewan economics student. This Shaney Komulainen (1990) photograph will remain an embodied Canadian memory of the tensions that exist today among Aboriginal Canadians and the non-native residents of Canada. No Canadian familiar with this image will ever forget the 78-day standoff of the Mohawk nation against the Quebec enforcements of the Sureté du Québec (SQ) and the Canadian Army. What they many not understand is the deep spiritual and cultural significance that the “Pines” hold for the people of Kanehsatake and why this resistance escalated to the state it did.

Throughout the history of the Mohawk and Iroquois Confederacy, the Aboriginal peoples sharing their traditional territory with the non-native people of the state have experienced and continue to experience much tension over worldviews of land use. The forceful intervention of the Quebec provincial police and the Army upon the Mohawk protest known as the Oka Crisis was not a new occurrence for this Nation; in the mid 1800s this same land was retained by the Roman Catholic Seminary with forceful intervention from the local authorities (Obomsawin, 1993; Simpson & Ladner, 2010).

The dispute which centered around an injunction for expropriation, essentially a land grab by the town of Oka to expand nine holes of an existing golf course and to develop sixty luxury condominiums for the elite of Montreal, all of it on the traditional lands of the Mohawk nation, is a quintessential example of the tensions around Canadian land use, and it paints a picture of the “white fathers” consumption within an Indigenous fight for the protection of sacred ancestral territory.

The pristine ceremonial pineland and the ancestral burial grounds members of Kanehsatake worked to protect, grabbed national and international attention when the Kanehsatake First Nation formed a blockade around the traditional site. In solidarity, the Mohawk brothers and sisters of Kahnawake blocked the Mercier Bridge south of Montreal. This blockade greatly angered the people of Quebec and it may have been the impetus for the escalated resistance and the forthcoming international focus on what has become the most significant crisis facing off Canada against the Indigenous peoples found within her borderlands. On July 11, 1990, television viewers saw the Sureté du Québec (SQ) deploy canisters of tear gas, flash bang grenades and then gunshots as members of this Quebec police force raided the Kanehsatake blockade. In the chaos, 31-

year-old Corporal Marcel Lemay of the SQ was hit by a stray bullet and died, and on July 15th the Canadian Armed Forces replaced the SQ.

In the days that followed this initial nightmare, the people of Kanehsatake resisted the forceful interventions of the SQ and the Army, while journalists and photographers tried to bring the long and soured history of this Canadian region to nations around the world (Obomsawin, 1993). Within that journalism, accounts of the most blatant racism have been filed. Two significant incidences include burning an effigy of a Mohawk warrior cheered on by 7000 protesting Quebecers fed up with the sympathy blockade of the Mercier Bridge, and the stoning and injuring of Mohawks, women, children and seniors as they travelled in a motorcade out of the reserve.

Within this history, the public, most having a distorted view of Aboriginal peoples based on their own colonized histories and likely knowing nothing about an Aboriginal worldview, also saw the need for the rich and white elite, the leisure classes, to have yet another private recreational development at the expense of hurting traditional peoples (Obomsawin, 1993). Additionally, they saw the deep hatred of Quebeckers against their own neighbours, the Aboriginal people of Quebec, and the ignoring of serious infractions by the SQ. Most often, however, they saw the news reports of mainstream media and how Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and Premier Richard Bourassa referred to the blockade as outrageous and the Mohawks as terrorists. Regardless of media presence, twenty years ago, it was difficult for many Canadians to see or understand the constructs of racism or colonialism, as the myth of white settler superiority was rarely debunked. This historical recognition helps one segue to an understanding of how environmental

racism exists within the structures and institutions of Canadian society today (Simpson & Ladner, 2010).

As in past histories, the town of Oka neglected to consult the First Nations peoples of Kanehsatake on this project, and as the municipality held the legal ownership of the expropriated land, no environmental or historical reviews of this development process were conducted prior to the implementation of forceful intervention. Even when more than 900 Oka residents opposed the acting mayor, Jean Ouellette, he chose a forceful intervention to remove the barrier around “the Pines” as a solution to the Mohawks defying a Supreme Court injunction.

Similar previous actions have been taken against the Mohawk peoples; history shows how the people of Kanehsatake were duped out of much land by church and state stemming from the 1700’s to modern day, with much of it disappearing in the 1950’s (Obomsawin, 1993). Ouellette just could not see his actions as an assault on the Mohawks and he justifies his position today. He is among those who continue to have no regard for the worldview of Aboriginal peoples, the spiritual significance of traditional lands and the ancestors who live upon them, and further, how his actions perpetuate continued racism in today’s society. Westra (1999) believes he is among the guilty:

Environmentally and culturally they were clearly under attack. Those responsible for the circumstances in which the Mohawks found themselves were guilty not only of racism but of environmental racism. The Mohawks are not the first or even the only people who have resorted to civil resistance and even violence in defense of the environment (Westra, 1999, p.118).

With all of the Mohawk history, and especially that of the Oka crisis, it would be certain the Government of Canada learned something; however, in 2009, this same government approved the development of an elite housing project situated near “The Pines” ancestral grounds. With much protest from the peoples of Kanesatake, the current council of Oka and the developer, Norfolk, were able to reach an agreement with the federal bureaucrats for the protection of these lands. The Mohawk Council of Kanesatake remains distrusting of the Government of Canada:

The Mohawk Council of Kanesatake reiterated that all the land included in the seigniory of Lake of Two-Mountains, which is claimed entirely by the Mohawk of Kanesatake, is currently the subject of negotiations with the federal government. For centuries, illegal sales of our lands have constituted a serious breach of the Crown’s fiduciary obligations to protect the Mohawks’ interests, a breach that is now officially acknowledged by the federal government (Mohawk Council of Kanesatake, 2011, para 2).

Opportunistic and illegal sales continue to plague the First Nations of Canada and the Crown’s fiduciary obligations are seriously neglected or inactive. Environmental racism is not only about action; it is about inaction. That being said, there are many Aboriginal nations with more than 500 land claims in limbo (AANDC, 2011) and beyond the land claim realities of thousands of First Nations members, there are the overriding health issues that have affected the Mohawk Nation. The aftermath of the Oka crisis had “immeasurable psychological, behavioural, physical and emotional effects on all community members, including children. Some community members reported feeling anxious, fearful, angry and depressed” (Nelson & Bonspiel-Nelson, 2005 para 1). The

trauma of Oka deeply affected the children and teens of the day. These people are the current adults who live in Kanasatake and many are those engaged in abusive and illegal activity. Although there is not “scientific” proof, the “the professionals and paraprofessionals at the Kanasatake Health Center have seen an increase in children expressing their feelings in negative ways, such as acting out of violence, abusing alcohol and drugs, contemplating and attempting suicide, self-mutilation, racism, bullying, dropping out of school, post-traumatic stress disorder and teenage pregnancy,” (Nelson & Bonspiel-Nelson, 2005 para 9).

In addition to the Oka effects, many other Mohawks have been exposed to mining and forestry exploitation and pollution in the area. McGlashen (2009) describes the Mohawk Nation as a “human laboratory for studying the health effects of industrial chemicals” as it endures the industrial legacy of racism (para 1). In light of this, Westra’s analysis of eco-crime (2008; 1999; 1996) continues to be ignored by governments and corporations. One might ask when her allyship and her knowledge of Aboriginal worldviews and the environmental racism perpetuated at Oka will be embraced.

Once Grassy Narrows: The Fight for the Boreal

Grassy Narrows, or the home of the Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinabe, has been on the radar of Canadian journalists for decades. Situated 80 kilometers north of Kenora and in the heartland of the Canadian Shield, the peoples of Grassy Narrows have endured colonialism for the past 500 years, and for the past 50 years they have lived with hopelessness and despair (Fineday, 2010). The exploitation of land and water in this area has devastated the peoples of this Anishinabek community and currently the community fights for the health of its eco-system, the Boreal forest, and for the health of

its peoples and wildlife. The environmental degradation found within environmental racism and the complete disregard for an Aboriginal worldview and voice is defined in the Grassy Narrows history:

Mercury contamination of their river system in the 1960s by a paper mill upstream devastated their economy, plunging the community into extreme poverty from which it has never fully recovered. After decades of petitions, letter writing, speaking tours, environmental assessment requests, and protests failed to halt the destructive clear-cut logging of their traditional territory, grassroots women and youth put their bodies on the line and blocked logging trucks passing by their community. The blockades are the longest running in Canadian history, now in their 8th year. 3 major logging corporations have bowed to pressure and committed not to log against the wishes of the community, and logging has been suspended on Grassy Narrows territory as of July 2008. But under pressure from corporate lumber giant Weyerhaeuser, the province appears ready once again to give the green-light to logging in the fall of 2010 (Climate Justice Montreal, 2010, p. 2, para 6).

Outspoken activist, blockader, mother and traditional healer, Judy Da Silva, has led women, children and men in a lengthy fight against corporations and governments, in particular the government of Ontario, which continue to clear cut and toxify traditional land and waters: “The same province that permitted paper mills to dump 20,000 pounds of mercury into our river, and permits industrial clear-cutting against our will claims to be protecting our environment by stopping road repairs.” (Da Silva, 2011, para 2). Da Silva has worked tirelessly to bring national and international attention to the realities of

environmental racism, colonial destruction and the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples: “We, the Anishinabek will never stop exercising our inherent right to use and protect the land, water and the forests,” (Da Silva, 2011, para 2).

Native American activist Winona LaDuke (1999) wrote extensively about the history of the Anishinabek peoples of Grassy Narrows and the actions of Judy Da Silva. Her analysis is one that must be noted as very little has changed in the course of twenty years. She links the pollution from the Dryden Paper mill to the mercury contamination of the fish and wildlife that exists even today. The 1960’s saw the dumping of “more than 50,000 pounds of mercury ... into the Wabigoon River system” (LaDuke, 1999, p.102).

In 1975 the Ontario Ministry of Health publicly admitted the scope of mercury releases were extensive. Since that time, scientists and students alike have completed many research studies and the findings show extensive deterioration of human health. Many of the residents have “prominent signs of Minamata disease, with symptoms such as slurred speech, shaking hands and an unsteady walk” (Nafziger, 2011, para 4) and the psychosocial signs of human despair are everywhere. The forestry practice of clear cutting, the damming of waters and the dumping of pulp and paper toxins into the water systems along Grassy Narrows has poisoned and devastated the people of this region (LaDuke, 1999):

The consequence was that there was a disruption of our ways of living, the ways that our people used to live before. Our spirituality, culture, self-esteem, and all of that. That mercury killed everything. We lost everything it took 30 years for them to even acknowledge what they had done to us. They compensate

[other] people for disasters, but they don't compensate us for what they did to us. Ours wasn't an act of the Creator, it was the act of man" (LaDuke, 1999 citing Frobisher, p. 102).

With support from Amnesty International, Rainforest Action Network, and Greenpeace, the people of Grassy Narrows have stood strong as they have pressured numerous corporations through legal proceedings and lengthy road blockades. Most recently, the forest products companies of Boise, Abitibowater, Domtar and Ainsworth have agreed not to source conflict wood from the Grassy Narrows traditional territory, but the Anishinaabek continue to fight Weyerhaeuser. Although the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement signed in 2010 is an "unprecedented accord covering more than 72 million hectares of public forest" (Paley, 2010, para 4) and a document with interim measures to protect caribou habitat, this government agreement, negotiated with nine environmental NGOs and 21 forestry companies left First Nations and grassroots environmentalists out of the discussion. Thomas-Muller and Macdonald Stainsby comment on the inability of mainstream environmental groups to hear the voices of Aboriginal peoples:

"The Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement is essentially another huge jump away from democracy, towards corporate control of the lands of Canada, as well as the corporatization of what is left of a once defiant environmental movement," said Macdonald Stainsby, coordinator of OilSandsTruth.org. Although the big environmental groups will drop their "do not buy" and divestment campaigns around Canadian timber, Thomas-Muller thinks the conflicts will continue. "I hardly think that this in any way represents an end to the conflict between the true

proponents of the war over the boreal forest, which of course are corporations and First Nations,” he said. “What this means is that First Nations no longer have the support of these mainstream environmental groups that have fallen into the strategy of conquer and divide deployed by industry” (Paley, 2010, para 11-13). Muller-Thomas and other spokespersons for “smaller environmental groups are worried the deal will distract from the ongoing devastation of Canada's forests, and could contribute to more false solutions for climate change” (Paley, 2010, para 14).

Regardless of this outcome, the Asubpeeschoseewagong Netum Anishinaabek, together with the Boreal Forest Network, the Boreal Action Project, and the Winnipeg Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement, have asked Weyerhaeuser to cease all logging and sourcing in the contested territory (Boreal Forest Network, 2012). They call upon the public to boycott all products and formally support their Nation in a petition notice to Weyerhaeuser. The people of Grassy Narrows recognize the corporate and government infractions they have endured in this long history and in this petition they cite the actions of the Province of Ontario and Weyerhaeuser in their diminishment of the Anishinaabe health and their inherent rights under *Treaty 3* as they ask Weyerhaeuser to withdraw from their traditional territories. Significant to their action is a “Ontario Superior Court of Justice [decision] recently released . . . *Keewatin v. Minister of Natural Resources* (Keewatin), which held that the Province of Ontario lacked authority to “take up” lands for forestry, or other activities that may significantly infringe upon First Nations’ hunting and fishing rights, with respect to certain lands under *Treaty 3* - the Keewatin Lands (Coleman, 2012, para 3-5). As the peoples of Grassy Narrows try to rebuild their community they have made it very clear that “multinational logging companies like

Weyerhaeuser are incompatible with their vision for the preservation and use of their territory” (Coleman, 2012, para 3-5).

Racism Hiding among Colonial Progress

Canadian stories of environmental racism are prolific. Each region of the country and the many First Nations, the Inuit, and the Métis, has been explicitly impacted by these real life situations. A few examples from the provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and the territories of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, build upon the stories of Fort Chippewan, Kanesatake, and Grassy Narrows to show the historical and current plight of Aboriginal peoples. These examples range from the activities of government and corporations found in mining, logging, water diversions and dams, oil and gas, to agriculture and recreational developments.

I will begin with the history of Manitoba and Canada and the example of Riding Mountain Park. The stories of Elder Stella Blackbird have compelled me to understand how traditional lands across Canada have been stolen from First Nations people to cushion the lifestyles of the white settler. In 1936, the National Parks Branch evicted the Keeseekoowenin Ojibway First Nation from a small reserve within the park boundary in “response to pressure from both local and departmental tourism boosters who hoped to create an attraction for automobile travellers from within the province and from the United States” (Sandlos, 2008, i). This, however, was not the only motivation. The Department of Indian Affairs supported this move from the Band’s rich hunting and fishing territory as “they thought such a move would bolster the department's program of assimilating Native people through immersion in the supposedly more civilized occupation of agriculture” (Sandlos, 2008, i).

Elder Stella Blackbird (2011) of Keeseekoowenin has told me personally of the hurt and disregard of the people as they were moved off their lands while their homes were burned before their eyes. Some of the peoples were whipped as they protested. Although the federal government and Parks Canada has acknowledged this wrong and a small parcel of land was returned to the Keeseekoowenin First Nation in 1986, many band members continue to be treated with disrespect from Parks officials as they enter their rightful traditional territory today. Historically, they were banned from the Park and punished when they sought to pick medicines or to look for sustenance. Both Westra (1999) and Sandlos (2008) draw attention to the white settler and his insistent need for recreational comforts at the expense of First Nations peoples.

The exploitations of mining and hydro are found extensively in the histories of Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories (Martin & Hoffman, 2009). Currently, negotiations are ongoing between several First Nations including the Fox Lake Cree Nation, York Factory First Nation, Tataskweyak Cree Nation, War Lake First Nation and Shamattawa First Nation and the Manitoba government as the Conawapa Generating Station is slated to become the largest hydroelectric project ever built in northern Manitoba. Although First Nations look positively to this development there is great concern regarding the flooding of lands as hydro projects throughout Canada have been detrimental to the traditional lifestyles of Aboriginal peoples.

Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart (2000), Highway (1999), Kulchyski (2007), Martin and Hoffman, (2009) and Siggins (1985) have documented the current and historical misuse and exploitation of Indian lands and the devastating outcomes of those who live in

these northern territories. *Bitter Embrace: White Society's Assault on the Woodland Cree* (Siggins, 1985) tells an explicit story of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation and their members who have occupied the lands of northeast Saskatchewan from time immemorial. Her vivid account documents the simultaneous and historical abuses of those who have endured sharing the borderlands and the resources of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Although Siggins defines these people as Woodlands Cree, members of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation signify their identity as Assin'skowitziniwak (people of the rocky area) or the Rocky Cree (Merasty, 2009). The area has been exploited through a long history of prospecting and mining exploration, and the exploitation continues to this day. When Cree trapper, David Collins, found copper and zinc deposits in 1914, white prospector Tom Creighton, after which the town of Creighton is named, quickly took the information and made it his own. In a similar fashion, those running Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting (HBMS), situated in the border city of Flin Flon, Manitoba, recognized the need for a power source to continue the mining and refining of this copper and zinc product, and they looked to the most economically and viable land and water source, known today as Island Falls (Opportunities North, 2011).

The Cree peoples of Sandy Bay, Saskatchewan have experienced a long and arduous marginalization through the building of the Island Falls Dam. Island Falls, situated on the Churchill River, 15 kilometers west of the Manitoba border, was the ideal resource for mining and in 1928 HBMS formed the Churchill River Power Company (CRP) to divert this waterpower. This company made use of the First Nations community and their members' traditional ecological and geographical knowledges, while they recruited white crews and supplemented the work of the project with Cree

labour. In the beginning, First Nations supported this project and although “First Nations men worked side by side with outsiders, laying the plumbing, framing the buildings, driving the trucks, painting the houses and running the boats” (Opportunities North, 2011, p. 6), they soon came to see how this was not the way to a shared wellness, both socially and economically, rather it was a continuum in the long history of colonization. The perpetuated demise of the Cree way of life was resisted and white privilege and racism prevailed. The Elders’ records show the lack of respect, as they explain how developers ignored their concerns about the sustainability of fishing resources. Lands were flooded. Homes and harvesting means were lost. Although the first power transmission for the mine occurred in June of 1930, it was not until 1958 that the community of Sandy Bay received the benefits of electricity. This blatant discriminatory and racist practice—the subsequent delay in electricity provision for First Nations homes—ensued because “the CRP did not think they could collect on electricity bills” (Opportunities North, 2011, p. 6). The situating of a white settlement on the other side of the First Nations community of Sandy Bay compounded years of historical separation, white privilege, and racism among settlers towards First Nations peoples.

Today, the communities of Sandy Bay and others in this region are fraught with generations of chaos and the simmering anger racism perpetuates. Extreme poverty and unemployment, secondary and crowded living conditions, high suicides among youth, sexual and domestic abuse, substance and drug related deaths and crime, and the loss of language and culture are prevalent realities within the First Nation (Fontaine, 2008, 2011). School children in Pelican Narrows, the neighbouring community of Sandy Bay, contend with three gangs and numerous staff changes at their two schools each year. I

personally know and speak to many peoples of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation. I have seen the poverty and the hurt and hopelessness that exists, as I spend each summer in Denare Beach and on the shores of Amisk Lake, the traditional waters of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation (PBCN). Members of both the settlement of Denare Beach and the Amisk Lake reserve make up a small but diverse community with identities resting in the categories of Aboriginal and settler residents. These miners and labourers, traditional harvesters, outfitters, artists, environmentalists, business owners, teachers, resource officers, students and summer residents carry with them a colonized history with a limited understanding of an Indigenous worldview.

HudBay, as it is now known, has long been on the radars of environmentalists as both toxic concentrations in air pollution and in water tables exceed the regulations. An Environment Canada study from 2001 listed Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting (HBMS) as a major polluter of air and soil in Canada and it has held this reputation over several years (Lalonde, 2003, para 5; Wroughton, 2001, para 4).

The Flin Flon mine and smelter complex has over 70 million tonnes of tailings in its waste management facilities, all acid generating. Over 4 tonnes of toxic heavy metals are released annually into the environment from the complex. The prospects are now dim for this operation to be responsibly closed and cleaned up. Many workers have sacrificed their lives for the company. Since 1929, 126 workers have died in the mining operations, 11 in the last decade. Much of the land surrounding the complex is contaminated with lead, cadmium, zinc, copper, arsenic and mercury (Mining Watch Canada, 2004, para 2).

The smelter was finally closed two years ago and although many reports indicated the high incidences of cancer and asthma among both Caucasian and Aboriginal residents in the area, the Flin Flon Soil Study will refute this claim (Intrinsik Environmental Sciences Inc., 2010). Tom Goodman, a previous chief operating officer and senior vice-president of the company lives in the community of Denare Beach, and sits on the board of University College of the North (Manitoba). When I meet him in my neighborhood, and sometimes on the sandy shores of Missy Island, Amisk Lake, we have conversations about our community, those around us and the health of the land. It seems to me his heart is good, his intentions are good and he believes the First Nations of Manitoba and Saskatchewan are deservedly linked to the prosperity found in Lalor Mine development of Snow Lake, Manitoba, and other developments in the north. I am not sure, however, if he recognizes the realities of neo-colonialism facing Aboriginal peoples today, and if he sees the correlations between the wellness of the *Earth* and the wellness of her peoples. The soured history of this mining community is still with us and it is fraught with division and sadness. Someday soon, I hope we will have that conversation.

Many of us have seen the international stories of the crime against humanity that HudBay Minerals is accused of. In this past year we have witnessed the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation and representatives from the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the province's Wilderness Committee work together to stop the company's encroachment of land on the Grass River Provincial Park. With the protection of the water and the caribou foremost in their hearts and minds, this First Nation organized two rallies with *Idle No More* protestors, and set up blockades on roads leading to the mining site. HudBay won an injunction against this Cree First Nation and is currently suing for diminished business

and the risk of worker safety. Currently, as they defend their membership against this injunction, the Mathias Colomb Cree Nation is exploring what they see as the illegal occupation of HudBay on unceded lands.

Within all of this news, there seems to be little change in the attitudes of HudBay workers, or in those of community members living in Denare Beach, Creighton, Flin Flon or Snow Lake, as they interface with the First Nations people of this region. Great divisions exist in these mining towns. The premise of the workingman and the ideologies it conjures up are real here. Moreover, the town of Creighton recently launched a campaign for the siting of a nuclear waste facility within the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nations traditional lands. The propaganda in this campaign uses “job-blackmail” as an incentive to push forward yet another hazardous initiative to ‘save’ the people of Flin Flon and Creighton from a looming economic fallout (Bullard, 1993, p. 23). In my thirty years of living in this community, I have yet to see an equity plan from HudBay or an environmental plan from Claude Resources (a mining company currently searching for gold on Missy Island situated in the northern part of Amisk Lake) showing any respect to the knowledges or the worldview of the Assin’skowitziniwak (the Rocky Cree) or the Swampy Cree of Manitoba. The leadership of the Peter Ballantyne Band recognizes the chaos sometimes visible in this Cree Nation and they search for solutions to alleviate the social and economic issues a century of environmental racism has inspired. Foremost in their minds and hearts, are the needs of their youth.

Like the first peoples of the Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation, the Denesuline of Northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba have incurred significant human rights abuses from Crown and church (Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 2000). The prevalence of

colonialism is evident in the Denesuline communities I have visited and confirmed by the research I recently completed in the north of Saskatchewan. They, along with their neighbours in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, have experienced a long history of colonialism, blatant environmental racism, and a dismissal of traditional knowledge.

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) of the Denesuline, particularly their knowledge of caribou, their migratory patterns and behaviors, is similar to the traditional knowledge, the Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) of the “Caribou” Inuit (Leduc, 2007). Historically, the Inuit travelled the Kazan River to support “cultural ties with the Dene and to maintain trade and kinship alliances” (Arima, 1984; Layman, 2005). Central to the sustainability of both nations is the preservation of the barren-ground caribou and the preservation of their “collective social memory” (Westra, 2008). When these entities are disrupted and when those in mining and environmental industries dismiss their knowledges, the lifebloods of their communities’ begin to unravel (Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 2000). Their shared traditional territory known as the “Barrens” is largely in Nunavut, however, some of the occupation is also in the North West Territories and incidentally, the travel routes of these nations intersect those of Déline First Nation in the Northwest Territories (Indian Claims Commission, 1993; Usher, 1992). While the Denesuline are a distinct regional group, with some cultural differences, all Dene within northern Canada share a common ancestry and the same language family.

Uranium mining and exploration have been of a great concern for both the Inuit and the Denesuline Nation of Canada as they seek to protect their traditional lands, waters, and in particular, the lifeblood of the Barrens, the caribou:

Baker Lake, a mostly Inuit community in the Kivalliq region of Nunavut, has a long history of struggles against uranium mining and exploration. In the late 1970s, legal action was taken against the Canadian Government and a variety of uranium exploration companies. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, they successfully fought against a proposal to mine uranium from the Kiggavik ore body, located on the post-calving grounds of caribou herds. But the Areva mining company still wants this ore, and ignoring community concerns about impacts on caribou, health and nuclear weapons development, have launched an aggressive public relations campaign. Feeling their views are not represented by the Inuit Organizations, [in particular Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.] Inuit from Baker Lake and elsewhere in Nunavut have formed *Nunavummiut Makitagunarningit* (Nunavummiut can rise up) (Climate Justice Montreal, 2010, p. 2, para 7).

Years before this during the 1930's and in another northern community, uranium was extracted and moved manually by the First Nations men from an Eldorado mine at Port Radium on Great Bear Lake. When the Denesuline worked for the Eldorado mine authorities, they manually carried sacksful of pitchblende, a substance used in the Hiroshima bomb, out of the mine without protective clothing or masks. The families and Elders of Déline were shocked, saddened and angered when finding out many years later that this substance had contributed to the loss of life in Japan and in their own community:

“We did not know the ore was bad,” one person said. “Non-natives didn't know, either.” The Dene started to ask questions in the 1980s when their men began to die. The Medical Officer of Health for the Northwest Territories only began a

register of diagnoses and deaths in 1989–90; the year before, it listed fourteen Dene men who worked in the mining, milling or transport of radium and uranium. All of them died from cancers associated with exposure to radioactive contaminants: lung, bone, throat (Salverson, 2011, para 14).

Although Eldorado uranium mine closed in the early 1960s, it reopened as silver mine a few years later and operated in that capacity until 1983. Finally, in 1998 the Déline Uranium Team (DUT) brought the reality of uranium poison to the Canadian public. In a report written by members of the Dene, “*They never told us these things*”, the DUT demanded the Canadian government respond to the health crisis in their community. The Canada-Déline Uranium Table Final Report, released in 2005, made twenty-six recommendations and although there was significant contamination found in the lake, the report concluded there was insufficient evidence to link harm (or incidences of cancer) to human or wildlife. This report has received much criticism from well known environmental journalist Andrew Nikiforuk and others including “cancer research scientist Rosalie Bertell [who] argues that using death records to assess the effects of uranium on a population is insufficient” (Salverson, 2011, para 18).

Currently, executives with the Alberta Star Development Corporation are assessing the feasibility of re-development as they seek new uranium deposits near Déline, while community members continue to fear the 740,000 tons of radioactive tailings Eldorado left beneath Great Bear Lake (Salverson, 2011). Many Déline young people have lost hope and some Elders believe all life will perish. Today, high incidences of cancer still exist. In Déline, also known as The Widow’s Village, significant concern rests with the contamination Great Bear Lake and the water system in the area

(Salverson, 2011). The work of the DUT has not stopped addressing the current needs of the community and in particular, the health issues of the residents and the wildlife.

Like many other First Nations, the Denesuline's resistance towards uranium and diamond mining has been diminished by the realities of corporate agendas, propagandas and globalization (Pembina Institute, 2007; Bielawski, 2003; Goldstick, 1987). The influences of colonization and the impact of "outsiders" taking what they need works to divert communities from traditional ways of life and traditional knowledges. The Denesuline of Hatchet Lake know full well what has transpired in the north of Saskatchewan and how the uranium industry has bulldozed their way into traditional lands and livelihoods (Mining Watch, 2011). Here in northern Saskatchewan, the ideology of "job blackmail" is well and alive (Bullard, 1993). As the peoples begin to accept western ideologies, their Aboriginal leaderships adhere, sometimes through no other recourse, to the necessity of revenue sharing and resource development with these powerful large corporations and governments (Martin, & Hoffman, 2009). This has been found in the realities of First Nations throughout Canada and some of the most significant examples rest with the First Nations of Manitoba, Quebec and British Columbia. Each of these provinces has forged new relationships within the context of treaties and land recognition with provincial and federal governments. One of the most significant agreements is the Northern Flood Agreement signed by the federal and the provincial government, Manitoba Hydro and the Crees in 1977.

The Northern Flood Agreement, a land claims settlement, allowed the development of the Lake Winnipeg Regulation/Churchill River Diversion projects, while compensating members of five First Nations (Split Lake, Nelson

House, York Factory, Norway House and Cross Lake) for environmentally related adverse effects on their lands, pursuits, activities, and lifestyles resulting from the projects (Fortin, 2001, p.47).

Although it is professed that a respectful environment of negotiation has transpired in the last decade and significant progress has been made in the area of revenue sharing between Aboriginal peoples, corporations and governments, many First Nations still suffer significant health and social ills, regardless of the monetary payoff from governments and corporations. Most recently on the new television documentary, *The 8th Fire*, Diom Roméo Saganash, Member of Parliament for the Quebec riding of Abitibi - Baie James - Nunavik – Eeyou and NDP critic for natural resources, spoke of the significant resource base of the James Bay Cree based on the James Hydro project and agreement, and equally of the significant horrors of neo-colonialism and how his people either endure or perish. A colleague of Saganash and a legal consultant for the Innu nation in Quebec spoke of the relationships of the Innu and the Cree, the differences and similarities, and the demise of Innu lands by the mining industry, with little compensation to the people. The seriousness of Armand Mackenzie's voice indicates the journey he has lived with the Innu of Labrador and the legal system he works with as he has "witnessed the termination of the Innu people's rights to their land, resources and way of life" in connection with the construction of mega hydro projects and mines" (Mackenzie, 2012, para 3). Both Mackenzie and Saganash link the high incidences of spousal and sexual abuse, alcoholism, violence, family discord, and youth suicide compounded by the issues of individual and familial poverty, poor housing, educational

disconnectedness and social despair to the context of racism and continued colonization (8th Fire, 2012).

Laura Westra has spent decades dissecting the phenomenon of environmental racism and in her analysis she has provided several perspectives of how race and racism intersects with the environment, Aboriginal peoples and their lives. Her significant work in the area of environmental racism and Indigenous peoples are found in the discourses provided in *Environmental Justice and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: International & Domestic Legal Perspectives* (2008), *Faces of environmental racism: confronting issues of global justice* (2001), *Environmental Racism and the First Nations of Canada: Terrorism at Oka* (1999) and *Environmental integrity, racism and health* (1996). These works provide a Canadian context on the links between Aboriginal peoples and environmental racism, and the health determinants of Aboriginal peoples, their kinships and relations, and the eco-systems they live within. In this analysis, she continually points a finger to eco-crime. Both she (1996) and Northridge (1997) have signified the complexities behind environmental racism to the ill health and cultural demise of people of colour and the collective movement to understand this phenomenon:

To discount racism as a potential contributor to disparities in health by race and ethnicity is to ignore well-established social history, not to mention the experience of many afflicted persons. Denial serves to perpetuate inequity. It also forecloses studies of racism focusing specifically on ill health and premature mortality.

Environmentalists have often been cast by the spokespersons for heavy industry as a threat to jobs and profits. Today, the country at large understands that environmentalism is not merely the preserve of a privileged elite protecting their

open spaces. Instead, urban and rural grassroots organizations, established environmental groups, and government agencies are assembling in force to address local environmental concerns (Northridge, 1997, p. 730).

Canada's Auditor General, Sheila Fraser, has produced 31 audit reports on Aboriginal issues and her harsh criticism draws public attention to First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and their quality of life indicators. In this analysis she also cites the inability of the federal government to manage the impact of climate change on peoples, eco-systems, and wildlife. She blatantly states the living conditions that exist within Aboriginal communities are much worse than anywhere else in Canada and too many First Nations lack what other Canadians take for granted. Most youth do not graduate from high school and drinking water contamination exists in more than half of all reserves in Canada.

“What's truly shocking however, is the lack of improvement,” she said. “In a wealthy country like Canada, this gap is simply unacceptable,” she said. “We cannot simply continue to do the same things in the same way. There needs to be a serious review of programs and services to First Nations. We need to identify what services should be provided and by whom, as well as the funding required and the expected results” (Kennedy, 2011, para 21-24).

As these reports focus Canada's attention on the context of necessary service and funding, they are not explicit in supporting Canadians in their development of understanding or embracing Aboriginal worldviews. Westra (2008) draws attention to this conflicting reality and she and other scholars call for a reintegration of humanity back into the bio-spheres and eco-systems of our lands through relationships that support

initiations, observations and apprenticeships of sustainability (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Berkes, 1999; Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992; Michell, 2005; Mitchell, 2009; Orr, 2004,1992; Shiva, 2005).

The conflicting nature of how land is viewed and used, as well as how it is understood and honoured, is a discussion required within the discourse of eco-justice. The impetus to move to this dialogue is critical for the kind authentic *peace-making* necessary for non-aboriginals in their reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples. In understanding the solutions to countering environmental racism, one must again look to the stories and histories of Aboriginal peoples. To fully grasp a re-storying or a counter discourse, one must begin to analyze the multiple data sources that give contextual knowledge to the activism of specifically, Aboriginal women as they seek avenues of environmental justice, peace and eco-wellness for the sustainability of themselves, their youth and their kinships.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Today, Indigenous peoples around the world continue to feel the tensions created by a Eurocentric educational system that has taught us not to trust our own Indigenous knowledge, and by an increasingly fragile environmental base that requires us to rethink how we interact with the earth and with each other (Battiste, 2008, p.8).

As I think about the words Marie Battiste shared at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference in Australia, I look to the wisdom of Indigenous scholars and Indigenous women who have held the leadership roles of Chiefs, Elders and Medicine Women. The relationships I have formed with these scholars, leaders and healers have helped me re-vision and clarify the interrelationship between my ontology, an Indigenous worldview, and the wellness of Indigenous peoples, *Mother Earth* and myself. I think about transformation and what that means for myself and for all others engaged in a research process that seeks the knowledges of Aboriginal women. In this reflection, I have come to believe transformative research is more than a methodology:

Transformative research is not a methodology. It is an orientation toward research that is defined by its intended outcome: producing a more just and equitable world ... Transformative research stimulates critical awareness of power relationships and empowers researcher and participants with the knowledge to change power relationships (Velazquez 1998, pp. 65–66).

As Indigenous research is a critical, emancipatory and often qualitative research, I look to both western and Indigenous scholars. Specifically, I look to renowned scholars within in the field of qualitative and Indigenous research. To begin, I cite the work of

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) as they define critical qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the gendered observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (p.5). They believe critical research to be emancipatory and they cite the work of Lather (2007, pp. x-xi) to show how this research “represents inquiry done for explicitly political, utopian purposes, a politics of liberation, a reflexive discourse constantly in search of an open-ended, subversive, multi-voiced epistemology” (Lather in Denzin and Lincoln, 2008, p. 5).

In choosing a research framework, I sought the best of supportive and transformative methodologies in meeting Indigenous people’s needs (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009). I believe the context of this query demands a working relationship with Indigenous peoples built on the principles of respect and allyship, in that allyship confers a way to right the wrongs, as well as a way to critically address and advocate for change without appropriating or overpowering those you seek to support. In supporting Indigenous research, the call for responsibility and partnership is further defined by Denzin (2005) as he clarifies transformative and critical qualitative research as a “collaborative social science research model that makes the researcher responsible not to a removed discipline ... but to those studied ... it forcefully aligns the ethics of research with a politics of the oppressed, with a politics of resistance, hope, and freedom” (2005, p. 952).

I have designed this research study on a foundation of Indigenous knowledge and by using corresponding research methodologies through the guiding work of Margaret Kovach (2009) and Shawn Wilson (2008, 2007). As Indigenous scholars sometimes turn to western ideologies for support, I too, followed this lead and utilized the western

research method of grounded theory to support the gathering and analysis of the data. As I advocated for this framework, I was cognizant of Cole's (2002, 2004) words as I sought to ensure the holism of Indigenous worldviews through methodological flexibility:

the idea of a chapter is anathema to who I am as an indigenous person
 implies western order and format as “the” legitimate shapers of discourse
 the universe being ordered into rationally constructed geometries
 precluding enthalpy to be the prescribed means of navigating
 rather than say entropy devalidating our own symbolic sense of ourselves
 perceptions of our perceptions making us take up the tools of the settlers (Cole,
 2002, p. 448 in Brunanski, 2009, p.39).

With caution and respect, I outline the Indigenous research methodological framework I have developed and used in this study, and the analysis process garnered from the western qualitative method of grounded theory.

An Indigenous Research Methodological Framework

Within the advocating for and the development of an Indigenous research framework, there must be some critique of the protection of western research methodologies, and the subsequent and critical need for an Indigenous research methodology to exist as the over-arching framework for this research. I asked myself the following questions about the engagement of this research to ensure I followed the ethical protocols of Indigenous knowledge:

Who are we serving? To what end?

Who benefits from this research?

Who will define, develop and deliver epistemologies and curriculums based on this research study and the findings?

Most often, western discourses based upon western research methodologies found within school curriculums do little to address racist threads of euro-centric ideology because they so often skirt the important central issue of Indigenous identity and self-determination. As I proceeded with the development and analysis of my study, the words of Marie Battiste stay with me. I have learned from her that this identity is grounded within the topographies of culture, language, land, ecology, and spirituality. Both Battiste and Youngblood Henderson (2000) contribute to an extensive body of Indigenous knowledge and each advocate for consultation and culturally appropriate protocols when engaging in research for and with Indigenous peoples. The diversity, complexity and interdependency of Indigenous knowledge was always foremost in my mind as I proceeded through each step of my research:

Aboriginal knowledge is not a description of reality but an understanding of the processes of ecological change and ever-changing insights about diverse patterns or styles of flux. Concepts about “what is” define human awareness of the changes but add little to the actual processes of change. To see things as permanent is to be confused about everything: an alternative to that understanding is the need to create temporary harmonies of interdependence through alliances and relationships among all forms and forces. This web of interdependence is a never-ending source of wonder to the Aboriginal mind and to other forces that contribute to the harmony (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p.264).

In thinking about dismissive constructs that exist collectively and globally within the life experiences of Indigenous peoples, I recognized the importance of an articulated framework of Indigenous research methodology that would meet the needs of local and traditional peoples. I further recognized components of Indigenous knowledge, specifically those that acknowledged the realities of interrelatedness, interdependence, and flux within the harmonies of ecology, as critical qualifiers within Indigenous research. Throughout this work, I prioritized those understandings to be important aspects within this investigating of environmental racism. The harmonies of ecology are explicitly tied to the cosmos and the cultures, the traditions and spiritualities of Indigenous peoples. The complexities that define Indigenous knowledges and research are outside many western research understandings and because of this, I searched for scholars who clarified the basis of Indigenous research and supporting methodologies.

Indigenous scholars Alfred (1999), Battiste (2008, 2006, 2000), Battiste & Barman (1995), Battiste and Henderson (2000), Chilisa (2012), Hart (2010, 2002), Ermine (1995); Kovach (2009), Michell (2012, 2005, 1999), Sinclair (2003), Wilson (2008, 2007) are among those who guided me during this research. Hart (2010) uses the work of Garrouette (2003) to advance a “radical Indigenism” (2010, p.6) and he further advances Wilson’s *Research as Ceremony* (2008). Through the work of Garrouette (2003), Hart (2010) explains:

She explained, “It argues for the reassertion and rebuilding of traditional knowledge from its roots, its fundamental principles” (Garrouette, 2003, p. 101).

Radical Indigenist scholars resist the pressure to participate in academic discourse that strips Indigenous intellectual traditions of their spiritual and sacred elements.

It takes the stand that if the spiritual and sacred elements are surrendered, then there is little left of our philosophies that will make any sense. I believe Garrouette's call for radical Indigenism has to be reflected in an Indigenous research paradigm in order to be considered Indigenous (Hart, 2010, p. 6).

The spiritual and sacred elements of the many Indigenous knowings gifted to me in this life journey, along with the re-claiming of my Métis ancestry, has helped me recognize the significance of both positionality and relationality within Indigenous knowledges and research (Martin, 2003). Throughout this learning journey, I thought about the guidelines that Martin (2003) asks researchers to consider when engaging in Indigenous research methodologies:

- 1) Recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival;
- 2) Honouring our social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people;
- 3) Emphasis of social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures;
- 4) Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands (Martin, 2003, p.5).

Along with Martin (2003), I looked to Weber-Pillwax (2001) as her work centralizes respect in all relationships and interrelations, and specifically within Indigenous research; a respect that encompasses and is extended to human and other life forms, the spirits and the ancestors, and even inanimate entities. All entities within our

cosmic and earthy environment are given respect and all are interconnected with the others. Connections are everywhere within Aboriginal life histories, and so they are found within authentic Indigenous research processes. Wilson (2008) draws a line to the first of these connections, that of the mind and heart. Indigenous languages and culture, and the connection of Indigenous peoples to traditional lands and life forms make up a whole part of this research, and as a beginner researcher, I have come to understand these entities as interrelated and essential components of Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies.

Chilisa (2012), Martin (2003) and Wilson (2008) all reference *research as ceremony*. Through my practical experiences and engagement in this study, I have come to know how and why research with Aboriginal peoples is ceremonial. This understanding moves the contextualization of Indigenous research methodology away from western paradigms of research. Without this adherence, the researcher, by position of default, may fall into an abyss of using the “master’s tools” (Lorde, 1984) and thus, the *master’s way* of knowing, conducting, implying and reporting may become prevalent. This being said, seeking protocols necessary to engage in Indigenous research methodologies, including within the collecting, analysis and reporting of data, are critical to the ethics found within an authentic Indigenous research paradigm.

Often at the beginning of a research process, traditional and spiritual ceremony takes place. A blessing, smudging ceremony, a sweat lodge ceremony or a naming ceremony may be included in the protocol. The respect for relationality precluded all of my actions and processes within this study. Choosing the topic, the selection of partners, participants and methods, and the conducting, gathering, analyzing and reporting of the

research are all bound by sharing, reciprocity and accountability (Kovach, 2009). In this support, Martin (2003) advocates for a cultural adherence of ceremony and relationality and she notes “reporting is culturally regulated through respect of protocols to others such as: asking permission, using preferred language, terms and expressions and the ultimate aim of maintaining relations” (p.15). As I moved through each stage of this study, I found this protocol to uplift and help me as I learned more from the participants and other knowledge keepers. Western researchers have much to learn about the traditional protocols of Indigenous peoples and I give thanks to those who assisted me prior to and during this engagement.

Central to the discussion of an ethical Indigenous research process is Marie Battiste, internationally renowned scholar and Mi' kmaq educator from Potl'tek First Nation. She references the word ‘research’ as “dirty” and cites another renowned scholar, Maori educator 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” (Smith in Battiste, 2006, p.1). This statement encourages those in educational research to step back and ensure ethical considerations are clearly articulated to meet the authentic needs of Indigenous participants.

Despite national and international efforts by many peoples, councils and universities to ensure the development of ethical guidelines for research with Indigenous peoples (Tri-Council Policy Statement, 2002), Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffery (2004) argue many critical issues remain. Confusion around issues of appropriation of knowledge and

the protections and sanctioning of collective knowledges exists in western knowledge systems and models built from Euro-centric foundations:

Understanding Western social and systems, and the role of education in the process of knowledge and cultural transmission and how they impact cross-cultural relations, is a necessity in coming to terms with Indigenous research. A desire to understand the intellectual undercurrents of unequal power relations and the issues of knowledge contexts brings clarity to the foundation of the ethics problem (Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffrey, 2004, p.16).

Battiste (2006) brings words of caution to western academics as she advocates for researchers to embrace a shared and transformative qualitative research model as one that recognizes and honours the inclusivity of Aboriginal voice, and the worldviews and cultural sensitivities of Indigenous peoples. Battiste (2006) believes issues of Indigenous representation should be examined from diverse traditions and locations. For example, one may look to the occupancies and travel routes of Aboriginal peoples to validate “ways of knowing” and “ways of being” found within Indigenous kinships. Essentially, the story of each kinship member encompasses the tradition and the locality around, not only themselves but also all living entities found within the traditional and ancestral lands of the kinship. The data collected through stories often leads the researcher to a baseline understanding of Indigenous lives and kinships and their cosmic interrelationships with all other living entities.

Battiste (2006) advocates for all researchers to seek the guidance of Elders prior to engaging in a research study and she insists universities utilizing western ethical protocols must understand protocols found within Indigenous communities prior to

conducting research involving people and lands within traditional territories. As “ways of knowing” (Martin, 2003) are defined through orality, voice and story, Battiste (2006) asserts the principles of research connected to Indigenous knowledges must be intricate to the land, languages, customs, traditions and ceremonies of the peoples. Indigenous peoples own these knowledges and researchers are obligated to engage in responsible, respectful practice when accessing and being guided by these knowledges. In order for an outsider or westerner to learn from these knowledge *keepers*, an awareness of, a respect for and an adherence to the protocols and practices found within traditional knowings are imperative. This view is supported by the scholarship of Battiste & Henderson (2000), Castellano (2004) and Wilson (2008). In Castellano’s (2004) *Ethics of Aboriginal Research*, the directives address community consultations, partnerships in research, informed consent, research as the intellectual property of Indigenous peoples, and the responsibility of researchers to engage in the education of communities.

Epistemologies and ontologies found within Indigenous research methodologies are critical lifebloods necessary for the creation of de-colonized pedagogies (Smith, L.T, 1999). The foundational research work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) is paramount in Chilisa’s analysis of ethical research (2012). She contends, “postcolonial indigenous research methodologies must be informed by the resistance to Euro-Western thought and the further appropriation of their knowledge” (Smith in Chilisa, 2012, p.11). That being said, all researchers, including Indigenous researchers, are responsible to this critique.

Smith (1999) additionally advocates for a critique of the *native intellectual* who positions himself as a post-colonialist with the freedom to “move across the boundaries of indigenous and metropolitan, institution and community, politics and scholarship”

(p71). With this in mind, she calls for all researchers to engage in a number of strategies to enhance decolonization for the liberation of Indigenous peoples and additionally, for those who engage in critical research. These seven points help researchers position themselves in ways that allow for research collaboration through the sharing of knowledges:

- 1) Deconstruction and reconstruction – “interrogating the distortions of people’s life experiences, negative labeling, deficit theorizing, genetically deficient or culturally deficient models that pathologize the colonized Other” as well as “retelling the stories of the past and envisioning the future” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 17).
- 2) Self-determination and social justice – in this process the researcher notes the “struggle by those marginalized by Western research hegemony to seek legitimacy for methodologies embedded in the histories, experiences, way of perceiving realities and value systems”. A move from a deficit-based orientation to one that acknowledges the lived experiences of those *being researched* and a protected space for authentic voices and self-determining actions are critical to the social justice movement (Chilisa, 2012, p. 17-18).
- 3) Ethics – Ethics are guided by Indigenous peoples’ protocols and their own review boards. Researchers are drawn to self reflection and self questioning to ensure the voice of the Other is heard (Chilisa, 2012).
- 4) Language – the use of Indigenous languages, phrases, nuances and literatures found within Indigenous cultures are all part of an anti-imperialist struggle. The validation of Indigenous knowledges and cultures

is key to creating space in the process of “decentering hegemonic Western paradigms” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 19).

- 5) Internalization of Indigenous experiences – “Indigenous scholars internalize their experiences, issues and struggles of the colonized . . . by coming together in global and local places to plan, organize, and struggle collectively for self-determination” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 19).
- 6) History – A study of the past is necessary to recover, re-vision and reconstruct history, culture and language so all may move forward (Chilisa, 2012).
- 7) Critique – Smith calls for a critique of all imperialistic models of research that deter the Other from voice (Chilisa, 2012).

In advancing this ideology of post-colonialism, Wilson (2008) directs scholars to make careful decisions when choosing a topic of research. He uses the *Circle of Life* to represent four quadrants of Indigenous research: epistemology, ontology, axiology and methodology. Within his advancement of axiology, Wilson (2008) shows the guiding principles of Indigenous research methodologies including those of respect, integrity and courage are essential to proceed. Wilson (2008) asks you to check your heart to ensure there are no selfish or negative motives for doing research. In my understanding of meeting the principles of defined within Wilson’s axiology of ethical conduct (2008), the researcher is required to be in authentic relationship with Indigenous peoples. A researcher who elevates a belief and understanding in “*Kakinow ni wagamakanak*—the degree to which we are all related” (Wilson, A., 2010, presentation and personal conversation) is on her way to becoming an ethical researcher. This critical engagement

honours the ancestry of Indigenous epistemologies or “ways of knowing” and relational ontologies or “ways of being” (Martin, 2003). Researcher positionality and the acceptance of relationality and interdependence and all it brings, often signifies accountability to the community. This means the researcher recognizes Indigenous keepers of knowledge as integral partners within the research process (Wilson, 2007) and that these “philosophers and prophets” (Wilson, 2008, p. 60) require consultation prior to the gathering of, during the analysis of the data, and within the development of theory or recommendations.

As I advocate for a new way in which to look at inequality and freedom, I do so by choosing the central accounts of positionality, relationality, reciprocity and accountability found within Indigenous research methodologies (Abolson & Willett, 2005; Anderson 2000; Battiste, 2006; Ermine, 1995; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2008; Martin 2003; Wilson 2008).

Storywork of *Kanawayhitowin*: An Indigenous Research Methodology

I have learned much from the knowledges of Elders and Indigenous scholars and the discovery of *Kanawayhitowin* (Kanawayhitowin, 2010) directs my lifework in scholarship and research. *Kanawayhitowin* is a Cree word that calls for the spirit in each of us to come forth to protect each other, and in a sense, all living entities. The English translation generates an idea that all peoples have a responsibility to care for each other’s spirit and in turn, to care for all life forms and *Mother Earth*. This concept of a network of caring—the caring of the spirit for all entities—is central to the evolution of understanding how and why Indigenous knowledges complemented by Indigenous research methodologies are critical, resistive, empowering and required. It is with the

guidance of *Kanawayhitowin* that I moved to the critical research steps found within an Indigenous worldview.

Kanawayhitowin is supported by my understanding of *Wahkohtowin*, the Cree word meaning kinship. This state of *being related* is fundamental to Indigenous culture and traditional beliefs (Ermine, 2001) and to my current directive. As an Indigenous research methodology, *Wahkohtowin* (O'Rilly-Scanlon, Crowe, & Weenie, 2004) seeks to provide one engaged in research processes with Indigenous peoples by grounding the researcher with a "kindredness" (Anderson, 2000). It is this "kindredness" that aids her understandings of tradition, language and ceremony (O'Rilly-Scanlon, Crowe, & Weenie, 2004). Critical to *Wahkohtowin* is the conception of the pathway or journey as a self-assessment, one that I, the principal researcher, must engage in. These scholars assert that each person must examine her own assumptions and understandings in relationship to Indigenous peoples and all of creation (O'Rilly-Scanlon, Crowe, & Weenie, 2004). Wilson (2001) reminds me of the fact that I am answerable to all kinships, individuals and collectives found within the cosmos and upon *Earth*:

... knowledge is relational. Knowledge is shared with all creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, or just with the research subjects I may be working with, but it is a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos; it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge [hence] you are answerable to all your relations when you are doing research (Wilson, 2001, p.177).

Armed with this understanding of relationality, I developed what I believed to be a transformative research study to engage Aboriginal women in a collaborative and collective process. I was hopeful participants would share, write, and speak about their experiences around personal resilience, political and spiritual leadership, youth, and collective advocacy in the quest of environmental and kinship wellness. In return, I would share my life experiences when invited to do so and remain cognizant to my actions.

The discovery of *Kanawayhitowin* and *Wahkohtowin* lead me to a learning path of how values are taught and honoured within Aboriginal societies. In the readings of and the discussions I have shared with Herman Michell (personal conversation, 2010; 2005), I discovered four principles necessary for ethical and responsible actions. These four principles of value formation found within Indigenous societies are critical pieces within the development of an Indigenous research methodology. For example, within the Woodlands Cree worldview, these four values, *Tapowakeythi tamowin* (truth), *Kisewatisowin* (kindness), *Asakiwin* (sharing/caring) and *Tapwiwin* (honesty) are necessary entities for the development of the human, and for humanity to seek balance, synergy and holism with all other entities (Hart, 2002; Michell, 2005). In this search for a partnership to enhance Indigenous research through Indigenous women's knowings, I heed the words of Michell (2005) and his advocacy for "walking in balance," a step necessary in any search for wellness (p.40).

Throughout this journey, I paid attention to this "walk in balance"(Michell, 2005) and the inner and outer dimensions of human existence, all others and mine. I have come to understand inner balance as the personal development of intellect, spirit, emotion and

physicality of the human (Hart, 2002) while recognizing the outer dimension of balance as one that supports “maintaining respectful interconnected, reciprocal and sustainable relationships beginning at the individual level embracing family, community, nation, and extending out toward the environment, plants, animals, and cosmos” (Michell, 2005, p.41). The work of maintaining balance while investigating and addressing the reality of environmental racism and ecological destruction of traditional lands is critical to the wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples and their relationship with their lands: “In order for the individual to be healthy, the land must be healthy” (Michell, 2005, p. 41).

These points of reference are critical for conducting research and they have helped me formulate the actions necessary to discover what the *Storywork* of *Kanawayhitowin* might be made of (Archibald, 2000). The understanding and acceptance of Cree knowings and values as shared principles within an Indigenous worldview helped me as I designed and worked through a research study encompassing authentic relationality, accountability and reciprocity, the pillars of Indigenous research (Kovach, 2009).

Kovach (2009) believes a Cree worldview implies a relational balance and within this view, the researcher’s positionality must show authenticity, accountability and reciprocity. As a scholar and researcher, Kovach (2010) insists it is about “giving back to Indigenous peoples” and she cautions me to be aware that research has often been invasive and hurtful to Indigenous peoples. By grounding my being within these Cree concepts, I have given my best to investigate this research topic with my heart and my mind—it is a topic which I believe can link Indigenous peoples and their kinships as they proceed to a pathway of wellness and self-determination, a topic which reaches for

avenues to *Mitho-Pimachesowin*—the Cree word for good way of life (Beatty, 2010, personal conversation; Hart, 2002). I believe my knowledge of these understandings helped me join other Indigenous women in relationship as we collectively searched for solutions of peace and empowerment so Aboriginal children, youth, women and men may encounter life journeys of wellness.

Background

In this journey, I explored how Indigenous women, particularly women who self-identify as Métis, Cree, Denesuline and Inuit, can provide a collective voice for a new direction. Indigenous women whom I am in relationship with and those who lead others in the work of environmental justice, advocacy, political education, or traditional healing were invited to join this research study. I used the Indigenous research methodology of *Storywork* (Archibald, 2008) and supporting western methods employed within grounded theory for this study's analysis.

Storywork enhances the foundation of Indigenous epistemology and ontology, and along with the analysis supported through grounded theory, it acts as a beacon of collective and authentic Indigenous knowledges. The stories of the Aboriginal women were guided by seven principles, those of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy as found within Jo-anne Archibald's *Storywork* research (2008). The *Storywork* principles, necessary entities of an Indigenous research methodology, assisted me as I unraveled the oral histories and current positionalities of these women to explore, appreciate, re-story and explain the knowledges of Aboriginal women as they dismantled environmental racism. I have learned from the methodology of *Storywork* that one must exhibit trust and patience when being guided by Elders or

other wisdom keepers (Archibald, 2008) and through this, I have come to understand the cycle of reverence and reciprocity in respect to the spiritual nature of this methodology (Archibald, 2008). I am hopeful this framework will help other Indigenous peoples, researchers, scholars and educators understand and appreciate how Indigenous knowledges can utilize *Storywork* as both a critical inquiry and an emancipatory re-visioning and action for the self-determination and transformation of Indigenous kinships.

To reiterate, the search for understandings and answers associated with environmental racism realities and the corresponding ecological justice initiatives are situated in the voices of Indigenous women leaders and their *Storywork*. As I sought to understand the resilience and positionalities of these women as they journeyed, and continue to journey, for solutions of hope and peace—the types of processes that may positively influence multiple generations of children, and in turn, school and community cultures—I looked to their traditional territories, their communities and kinships to investigate whether environmental and ecological destruction occurs. I drew from multiple data sources, including the literature, the *Storywork*, artifacts, photography and cultural mapping initiatives to analyze the overlapping implications of environmental racism, environmental education research, Indigenous knowledges, and peace resistances to illustrate why the voices of these Indigenous women are critical for self-determination, ecological justice and wellness among Aboriginal peoples.

Significance of Title

Sisters of *Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin* - Wise Women of the Cree, Denesuline, Inuit and Métis: Understandings of Storywork, Traditional Knowledges and Eco-justice among Indigenous Women Leaders

In choosing this title, I knew the framework must have an authentic dialogical process and be grounded within the languages and cultures of those I sought to understand. Although the cultural knowledges, languages, and traditions of the Cree, Métis, Denesuline and Inuit are diverse, and this inquiry seeks to honour each Indigenous group's distinct knowings through language and culture, I chose to name this research study Sisters of *Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin*. I did this to define the solidarity, strength and courage of Indigenous women globally as *Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin* is a Cree word for resilience (Vizina, 2010, personal conversation). I have honoured each of the Indigenous languages from the four groups of Aboriginal women participating as partners in this project, however, I used the Cree language in the title and primarily throughout the discussion to honour the teachings and guidance of Cree Elder and Medicine Woman Stella Blackbird, as it was she who first led me to the path of this journey. I thank her and the many Cree knowledge keepers who have shared their knowledge of the Cree language with me. The traditional knowledge of these Cree linguists, Elders and teachers is deep and rich, and I have been gifted with words and phrases found within the dialects of the Swampy Cree, Woodlands Cree and Plains Cree peoples. In addition, I also gratefully acknowledge the gifts of language from the women of this study who have Inuit, Denesuline and Métis ancestry.

Research Query

In coming to a research query, I reflected on my experiences, both personally and as a professional educator. I thought about my intuitive and affective responses while dealing with issues of concern and crisis. I listened to the voices of students and parents and teachers, and these voices remain in my mind and soul. I sought the guidance of Elders and I listened to their stories. From my theoretical and scholarly research and my practical teaching experiences, I have seen how children and youths' experiences in their school years are critical to their future life outcomes for social capital. In learning about the formative years and life circumstances of children and youth, I began to see their significant impact on the future of their families, kinships and societies. For many years, I searched for answers that show how wellness evolves. Before and during this journey, I had an innate feeling about women's knowings and the potential to heal. In all of this, I felt it was critical to explore the reasons why Indigenous women engage in healing leaderships for their communities. At the beginning of this study, I had many questions:

Who the women are that take on these roles? Really, who are they? And if they use healing processes, why is that? Is the addressing of environmental racism and ecological destruction important to these women? What is the impetus that spurs these Indigenous women to action? How do these women act as leaders who are healers? Are they engaged in the mentorship of other women? What exists as Indigenous healing? What types of initiatives are they engaged in, how are they implemented and what outcomes prevail, primarily for children and women? Do these healing initiatives create immediate and long-term wellness within families and communities? Do these processes implicate changes in

school cultures? Do these processes create cooperative partnerships between communities of educators and Indigenous peoples? How can this knowledge help educators create peaceful environments, a culture of eco-literacy and optimal learning opportunities for all students in schools?

Throughout this effort, I reflected on my first understandings of *Kanawayhitowin*, *Wahkohtowin*, *Sāsīpihkēyitamowin* and *Mitho-Pimachesowin*. In formulating a plan for the research design and for the collection and analysis of personal and oral responses, I contextualized the meanings of these words. Within that, I conceptualized the research questions I created for this study:

Thesis Question

How are Indigenous women in Canada using leadership and healing to address environmental racism and ecological destruction found within their traditional territories?

Sub Questions

How does environmental racism display itself within Indigenous communities?

How are traditional lands influenced by ecological destruction?

How are Indigenous women's actions influencing the children and youth of their communities?

How are these same actions influencing educators and school cultures?

What future directives can Indigenous women provide for policy development and curricula evolution in the areas of eco-literacy, environmental justice and peace education?

Research Methods: Of Storywork and Grounded Theory

Guided by the principles of *Kanawayhitowin* and *Mitho-Pimachesowin*, I turned to the scholarship of Hart (2002) and Michell (2005). As I keep the teachings of Battiste (2008, 2006, 2002), Kovach (2010, 2009) and Wilson (2008, 2007, 2001) close to my heart, I am hopeful in my belief that I have journeyed as an ethical partner. In choosing to center the scholarship of Jo-anne Archibald (2008) within this study, I believe I maintained a clear pathway of academic evolution from narrative inquiry to an Indigenous worldview of *Storywork*. I believe it is this *Storywork* that gives researchers the latitude to transference Indigenous knowledges to a western ideology of “accepted” academic discourse (Archibald, 2008). That begin said, I believe, it is the *Storywork* that truly makes this study an authentic Indigenous research study. This *Storywork* supported by an analysis of grounded theory, constitutes the “data” found with the study. A synergy of each contribution aids me, the researcher, in the development of new theory or directive. In addition, data sources, such as symbolisms, photographs and cultural maps defining the traditional territories and the life activities of these Indigenous women were useful as tools of analysis. The photographs and cultural maps gifted to me were merged with the *Storywork* to support the “voice” of the Aboriginal women in this study. I have made efforts to ensure the contexts of dialogue, orality and scholarship within the knowledges of these Indigenous women have been intertwined to deliver an Indigenous discourse of eco-justice.

The rationale for using grounded theory in the collection and analysis of this study is supported by Goulding (2004) as she posits it “begins as a ‘commonsense’ process of talking to those informants who are most likely to provide early information”

(2004, p.301). Through my own interests and experiences, within my professional and personal journey, I intuitively recognize the actions of Indigenous women engaged in transformative leadership. Within the study of grounded theory, several researchers advocate that a researcher must choose between

initially adapting or generating a theoretical framework with which to analyze and interpret a specific phenomenon; and by allowing an understanding of the phenomenon to emerge through data analysis and a literature search that is performed mainly after data have been collected,” (Pettigrew, 2000, p. 2).

In this analysis Pettigrew (2000) shows the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) as one that allows researchers the ability to bridge the data while moving to new theory generation. Although I have a limited history of studying environmental racism, I have been engaged in the protection of the environment and Indigenous lands for many years. With this understanding, I believed my knowledge of the discourses around environmental racism and ecological justice is one bias I could consider within the reflexivity of the research design. It became a consideration I reflected upon as I gathered and analyzed the data within the study, and I found it helpful:

A researcher who is close to the field may already be theoretically sensitized and familiar with the literature on the study topic. Use of literature or any other preknowledge should not prevent a grounded theory arising from the inductive–deductive interplay which is at the heart of this method. Reflexivity is needed to prevent prior knowledge distorting the researcher’s perceptions of the data (McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007, i).

The design (including the collection and analysis of data) and the flexibility of this research framework allowed me to seek “new” theory through the use of “grounded theory” Charmaz (2006). Within this study I sought to show the “relationship between theory and data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and the effects of researcher presence on the data collected” (Hammersly & Atkinson, 1983; Lincoln & Guba, 1985 in Anderson, 1989, p. 254). As the principal researcher, I engaged in two forms of reflection, that of self-reflection and that in which I gave attention to the dialectical relationships of Indigenous peoples and western social systems. Understanding the constructs of history, location, and human agency are necessary pre-cursors within a search for eco-justice; so too are the creative and critical means by which you search for truths to understand relationships of conflict and power. That being said, I argue that an understanding of environmental racism and the colonial histories of Indigenous peoples are critical and necessary to the analysis of this study.

The discourse analysis that comes from grounded theory can be used to apply a lens of critical transformation. Within this study, transformation may come through the empowering of Aboriginal youth and community members, particularly as they discover and hear the words of women leaders. Often Aboriginal communities are left out of important discussions, those that address the historical and current social, political, and cultural structures and constraints that impact their traditional lands and their well being. When Aboriginal peoples are included in environmental forums and plebiscites headed by industry and governments, their important words are often minimized or over-powered through the discourses of job blackmail and other definitives found within the language of environmental racism (Bullard, 1999). As an Indigenous research framework calls for

partnership to instigate future developments, I attempted to engage the participants in the analysis, by asking for their assistance in the reading of personal narratives and my inductive analysis. This view supports Glaser's premise in that the "primary purpose of grounded theory [is] exploration, to be followed later with verification studies" (Pettigrew, p. 3).

The use of grounded theory in both the collection and analysis of the data allows for an evolution of process, and as such, it is open to continued and reflective coding. In this collaborative research study, I believed participants should be gifted with an extended or modified research design. Ultimately, if the majority of the participants required change, the design of the study allowed for these changes. I built reflexivity and flexibility into the design of the study by providing participants a number of options within the collection of data. Participants could choose to answer only those questions (Questionnaire A; Questionnaire B) with which they felt comfortable, and they also had significant flexibility and choice regarding the *Storywork* they wished to share. Every participant was invited to share 'other' data sources with me, and each participant had the option to 'tell' more than one story in the *Storywork* component of the data collection. Additionally, those who requested specific quotes, and the location of these inclusions, to remain anonymous, both orally and within the thesis, were honoured.

I have asked the Indigenous women in this study "what is" and "what could be". In honouring the flexibility of the principles within Indigenous research methodologies, I planned to provide opportunity for the participants to engage in an understanding of their own embodiments as well as their activism. A deep and rich analysis of discourse and narrative is often supported by the methods found in western narrative inquiry or within

Indigenous research methodologies of focused storytalk, circle stories or *Storywork*. The collective and shared design of the research questions and the orality and nuances of the responses allow for a complex reporting of Indigenous embodiment and lived experience. Often, *Storywork* includes the memorability of childhood and the informant's understanding of relations and ancestor teachings as it provides lessons of how wellness, leadership and healing are pursued within resistance, peace and activism. Although I did not have the funding to bring these women together for a circle talk, I felt I created community in the introduction of each to the other. The depth of this influence was expressed in the gratitude participants offered me when I provided a teaching of whom "the others" were in the story.

I invited the participants of this study to provide their story by way of a personal semi-structured interview and/or short written story on one of four critical areas that could provide me with a deeper analysis of each woman's resilience in the countering of environmental racism. This *Storywork* could include memorability of childhood, as well as lessons of wellness, leadership and community. It also included stories of ancestral teachings and those of resistance. Brunanski (2009) explains how she merges western knowings of narrative inquiry with the Indigenous knowledge of *Storywork*:

Narrative research privileges the voice of the story-teller, which is aligned with Aboriginal researchers who advocate beginning with the voices of Aboriginal people themselves. Furthermore, *critical* narrative research privileges the voices of participants, yet also has the potential for situating their narratives within larger contextual narratives. This is important, since, as Abolson and Willett (2004) argue: "Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers today who tackle any facet of

Indigenous study must have a critical analysis of colonialism” (Abolson and Willett, 2004, p. 120). Narrative inquiry seems to allow for the construction of knowledge that is contextualized, while still honouring human agency and facilitating the empowerment of the voices of the participants, which is aligned with Aboriginal perspectives (Brunanski, 2009, p.33).

The work of scholars Anderson and Lawrence (2003), Archibald (2008), Atleo (2009), Regan (2010) and Fitznor (2006) reference the significance of oral histories and ally relationships with Indigenous peoples. Each of these storyworkers generates a critical lens to aid researchers in the widened contextualization of the social, political and cultural implications of colonization. Bearing this in mind, I am hopeful the *Storywork* sought within this study enhances the contextual narratives of the Aboriginal women and their kinships. The ceremonial spirit of this *Storywork* gives the Indigenous women in this study the opportunity to deconstruct environmental racism and influence an ever-growing network of Indigenous scholars and most critically, Aboriginal youth. Settee (2007) shares her understanding of Indigenous knowings as it relates to the significance of stories and *storytelling*:

Storytelling in a contemporary setting combines the teachings of the past and adds a new dimension of the political, cultural, and environmental challenges faced by our communities today. Everyone has a story, and honouring those stories will provide an important community-healing aspect to our lives and drive the formal learning process. In fact, some feel that this is the only way as it is a liberating means of giving everyone voice and of ensuring that everyone’s voice is heard. Honoring the oral is an essential part of storytelling. For those fortunate to be

able to speak their original language, they have the added dimension of nuance, meaning, and context, but non-Indigenous speakers' experience with stories are no less important and instructive. Culture is always changing, adapting, and rebirthing to add new cultural, linguistic, and transformative experiences. All of these adaptations and transformations must be included in storytelling, especially in cases where the culture has been deeply impacted by social, political, and economic forces. For people who have been marginalized by formal schooling, storytelling is a teaching and learning legacy. It is a tool for analysis, hope, and the essence of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. It is an essential aspect to the rebirthing of nations (Settee, 2007, p. 87).

Logistics of Research Study

Invitation and consent to participate

Eight Aboriginal women from four distinct Nations in Canada were invited to participate in this study. I utilized purposive sampling by choosing five potential participants and then I engaged in snowball sampling by asking the original five participants to make reference to other Aboriginal women from their Nations so a minimum of eight participants was ensured. As participants, the Indigenous adult women from traditional territories in Canada self-identified as members of these four distinct Aboriginal Nations: The Denesuline, the Cree, the Inuit and the Métis. Participants of this study have leadership experiences with peace initiatives, political education, school cultures, environmental movements and/or healing from traditional perspectives. The participants selected were women with diverse ages, experiences and educational backgrounds.

As the principal researcher, I made contact with these women in December of 2012. All participants selected for this study were initially contacted by telephone and during this telephone call, I explained who I was, the nature of this research study, my interest in conducting this research and how I came to choose the contact as a potential member of this study. Once a contact expressed interest, the research study package was provided to each participant in writing; included within this document were pieces of the study as defined in the appendices. I sent the letter of invitation, the consent form for participation and a guided research package to each woman who indicated interest. The research package included a background document defining the questions of the research study, the definition of environmental racism as found within Indigenous communities, the questionnaires and the *Storywork* Guide. All documents utilized University of Manitoba letterhead to confirm the legitimacy of the study. (See Appendices A - G)

Self-identification as a necessary Indigenous method

Although each member of the study was given the option to maintain aspects of anonymity and confidentiality within the study and the writing of the dissertation, each was advised on the importance and necessity of self-identification within Indigenous research methodologies. As *Storywork* holds validity by its authentic membership and positionality, this investigation of the unraveling of Aboriginal culture and knowledge within traditional lands required each participant to lend her voice and leadership through the stating, claiming or re-claiming of identity. Additionally, this self-identification was important as each member of the study was introduced through written correspondence to all other members of the study. At the onset of the research study, each member was asked to share her name, her voice and her stories with others, and to give consent to a

participant list and contact information so she could gain support from the other Aboriginal women in the study, should she wish to do so. This process was utilized to ensure transparency and continuous long-term support for each of the Indigenous women in this research study. Within my first submission to the Ethics Board, the University of Manitoba asked for justification of this process. I provided the Board with a written submission of this important feature; the study and this feature was subsequently approved.

Withdrawal from study

All participants were given the option to withdraw from the study if they choose to do so. Three women of whom I made contact declined during the initial telephone conversation, and one after an in person meeting. Two participants who verbalized consent and were sent the research packages withdrew prior to conducting the initial interview. These two participants cited personal reasons for this withdrawal and one suggested other potential participants, however, none were chosen. The packages were returned to me upon their withdrawal from the study.

Data Collection

Martin (2003) calls for both “ways of knowing” and “ways of being” to be synthesized in the context of “doing”. Following the initial call inviting the women to this study, I packaged the contents of the study and sent the documents and a gift of sweet grass, tobacco, and tea to each woman. I proceeded to formalize the dates of the interviews and was able to conduct these within a three-month period from January 2013 to March 2013. As a researcher engaged in an Indigenous research methodology, I shared my positionality with those participants who wished to know more about me as I

engaged in the collection of data. This sharing implies courage, personal integrity and a collective respect for the positionalities of all other Indigenous peoples. As I visited and called upon the women of *Sisters*, I was graced by their openness and generosity. Invites to homes and invites to hearts made this work the best of my life. It has been said “ways of knowing” and “ways of being” are found when the researcher utilizes authentic and traditional Indigenous methods in the collection of data, and as such Wilson asserts the best methods are “process-oriented” and “grounded within Indigenous epistemology” (2007, p. 195). I believe this means that you must follow the guide of the participant, and meet her on her ground, and in her way. The overarching framework and principle of respect found within relationality must guide the choice of methods and the gathering of the data. Scholars often utilize such methods as sharing circles (sometimes focus groups), personal narratives, memory work, storying and exchange talk, photographs, petroglyphs, and participatory action (Wilson, 2007; Martin, 2003; O’Rilly-Scanlon, Crowe & Weenie, 2004) and several were used within this study. Martin (2003) asserts that Indigenous “ways of doing” are critical means by which data can be gathered. Ethical researchers must learn to conduct “field work, that immerses the researcher in the contexts of the entities and to watch, listen, wait, learn and repeat these processes as methods for data collection” (Martin, 2003, p.15). I found that, like many researchers before me, I was to enter a lengthy and flexible engagement in the collection of data. It was during this fieldwork, that I experienced a time of great emotion, intuition and spiritual awakening, and I believe this aided me in not only the collection, but in the analysis and organizing of the data, and in the writing of this thesis.

Research Instruments

The instruments used in this research project include two questionnaires, Questionnaire A (primary) and Questionnaire B (follow-up), *Storywork* Guide, audio recordings of Storywork interview, a transcribed interview, photographs, cultural maps, artifacts, field notes, memos and other artifacts. The questionnaires and Storywork Guide (for oral and written responses) were provided to the participants at the onset of the study. Participants wishing to contribute photographs or cultural maps for a collective data source of knowledges regarding traditional lands, environmental racism and ecological destructions, were invited to contact me to discuss this. All photographs, documents, and cultural maps were returned to the participants or owners of said documentation upon completion of the study.

Procedures

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by myself and with the support of another Indigenous transcriber who signed a code of confidentiality. Questions utilized for the *Storywork* interview were defined and included in the research package; however, during the interviews, I probed participants with open-ended elaborations or clarifications (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p, 145). Once the transcribing of the interviews was completed, the transcriptions were sent to the each of the participants for validation. I followed-up by phone calls and emails to confirm the validation of nuances, words and stories. All participants had the opportunity to engage with me to make changes to the transcripts or to the questionnaire responses (within the four month period following acceptance of participation). Participants could not change responses after the time period had expired, however, they could ask for an omission within the thesis.

Data Analysis, Reporting and Validity

In providing a framework for analyzing *Storywork* (Archibald, 2008) I sought other researchers who have been engaged in narrative inquiry with and for Indigenous peoples. Brunanski (2009) uses the framework of McCormack (2000a, 2000b) to ensure accountability to the storyteller. She offers the following steps as a systematic check to support the analysis of narrative inquiry, and for this circumstance *Storywork*:

1. Viewing the interview transcript through multiple lenses, which involves the following:
 - immersing oneself in the transcript through a process of *active listening*;
 - identifying the *narrative processes* used by the storyteller;
 - paying attention to the *language* of the text;
 - acknowledging the *context* in which the text was produced;
 - And identifying *moments* in the text where something unexpected is happening.
2. Developing interpretive stories using the views highlighted through the multiple lenses (McCormack, 2000a, p. 285).

In this analysis I must clearly understand and articulate my positionality along with that of the informants. My own life experiences and biases, and the structural and historical forces that help form the research study, were stated at the beginning of the study as they influence the formation of the methodology within the study. In this study I sought to advance Indigenous women's voices by "first observing behavior and verbal discourse, followed by the generation of meaning through researcher-participant

dialogue. In this way, knowledge is created, and validity and trustworthiness are enhanced” (Harrowing et al. 2010, p.242). I moved through the discourse and theory to determine “what is” to “what could be” as I asked these Indigenous women to share their life histories and understandings related to collective Indigenous wellness. In working towards a synthesis of Indigenous data, Martin asks researchers to pay attention to “languages, art, imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organization and social control. Again these are life stage, gender and role specific” (Martin, 2003, p.11). When drawing conclusions, Martin implies it is more about the reconnection or celebration of relationship than “capturing truth” (p.15). This last statement by Martin rings true for me. I celebrate each day for the richness I have received from relationship with the women of this study. The gendered self-determination, the traditions and the imagery of their Indigenous knowings are now infused within this thesis and whether I have “captured the truth” remains to be seen.

In moving through the coding and analysis of the data, I found it imperative to heed the words of Martin (2003), and although I have investigated a variety of western and Indigenous avenues for coding, note taking, memoeing and journaling, I was cognizant of the overriding understanding of “relationship”.

According to Seidel (1998) the process of qualitative data analysis consists of three parts: noticing, collecting and thinking about a topic of interest. In simple terms, Seidel (1998) indicates that noticing is about making observations, writing the field notes, taping the interview and gathering documents to support your study. He indicates that when this is done, a record of the “things” you have noticed have been collected, “As you notice things in the record, you name or code them” (p.3). Within this record you have

“pieces” and you notice and “code” those, and this is how you begin to collect what is critical to the study. He cites Charmaz (1983) to assist the researcher in understanding the coding process:

Codes serve to summarize, synthesize, and sort many observations made of the data.... coding becomes the fundamental means of developing the analysis.... researchers use codes to pull together and categorize a series of otherwise discrete events, statements, and observations which they identify in the data (Charmaz, 1983: 11). At first the data may appear to be a mass of confusing, unrelated, accounts. But by studying and coding (often I code the same materials several times just after collecting them), the researcher begins to create order (Charmaz, 1983, p.114).

In ‘thinking’ about how you examine the things you have collected, he believes the researcher’s goal is to make sense out of each collection by looking for patterns and relationships within one or more ‘collection’. This thinking further asks the researcher to make discoveries about the phenomena she is researching.

Seidel and Kelle (1995) view the role of coding as “noticing relevant phenomena; collecting examples of those phenomena; and analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns and structures” (Basit, 2003, p. 144). This helped me develop a scheme to organize the data, so I could question and compare, and make changes to the categories or themes. In creating a schematic diagram I was able to make sense of the themes found within the data.

Basit (2003) shows how manual and electronic methods can be used to code data, and how both methods use themes, categorizations and matrices to organize the data and

produce interpretations. Data analysis generated in a manual way is tedious compared to computer generated coding, however, often in electronic methods, categories are determined before research is undertaken. As manual methods of coding gives the researcher some latitude in determining what categories may inform the analysis, I initially proposed to engage in this process at the beginning of the analysis. When I began the coding, I began with open coding and I chose to use ATLAS.ti to help choose the most frequent words and phrases used by the participants. During this stage I used the word cloud component in ATLAS.ti to decipher common words and phrases, and once I had the words and phrases, most frequently used I returned to the manual method and an in vivo attempt at coding each transcript. From here I was able to establish several ways in which to code, categorize and pick themes that would be addressed in the *Storywork* of this thesis.

This quotation, from a qualitative study done to determine how the aspirations of adolescent British Muslim girls are shaped, best explains how I used the manual method in the coding analysis of *Sisters*:

Several analyses were carried out in the two phases, both during the fieldwork and after its completion. This involved listening to the interview tapes; transcribing 99 interviews; translating parental interviews – which were in community languages – into English; reading the transcripts a number of times; summarizing the transcripts and composing six matrices and choosing categories; coding statements; linking themes; selecting quotations; and ultimately, generating theory grounded in the data and writing it up in a coherent fashion (Basit, 2003, p.147).

This discussion shows how I organized and understood the multiple data sources I collected from the Indigenous women and the literature. The collation and synthesizing of the participant interviews, their written responses, and the literature review, allowed me to organize my thoughts by searching for “threads of similarity” the selected scholars and participants provided. Deductive coding was useful for a thematic analysis of the literature while inductive coding was useful to analysis the multiple sources of data the participants supplied.

I utilized a codebook for theme coding and memoing of units of meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). When researchers utilize a methodology in grounded theory, the two or more methods of coding can be merged to support a flexible analysis. Most data is analysed through the application of open coding techniques, or line-by-line analysis (looking for words and sentences in the text that have meaning), which should help to identify provisional explanatory concepts and direct the researcher to further “theoretically” identified samples, locations, and forms of data” (Goulding, 2004, p.301).

When I began this work, a schematic conceptualization of the current scholarship around Indigenous women’s knowledges, environmental racism and eco-justice, allowed me to see the following words and I realized when I completed the initial coding process, that these critical categorizations were repeated in the participants’ stories: justice, environment, racism, ecological destruction, colonization, disease, illness, abuse, poverty, ceremony, territories, land, living entities, language, culture, kinship, Elders, women, apprenticeships, ancestors, Creator, spirituality, intuition, tradition, and the heart values—kindness, truth, sharing, honesty, respect, gratitude, reciprocity and of

significance, the category of relationship. I have found this statement by Basit (2003) was useful in helping me understand the complexities that exist when one begins to truly analyze qualitative data or data that has been collected through Indigenous research methods such as storying or symbolism:

The user must still create the categories, do segmenting and coding, and decide what to retrieve and collate. No amount of routine analytic work will produce new theoretical insights without the application of disciplinary knowledge and creative imagination (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996, p. 145).

Throughout this research process I gave attention to the comments, the emotions of the participants, the land and its geographical and spiritual body formations, and those of these women and myself. Of great significance was the transference of the participants' childhood memories and values to a comparative of those they hold today. Within the journaling or field notes, I wrote about my own feelings and my visits to the traditional lands of these women. The intensity of emotion during the interviews and in the days following led to an intuitive knowing of what themes were critical and which were secondary. The memoeing was more specific to the codes found throughout the transcripts and how these might transfer into larger themes or theoretical understandings. When I began to code the relevant passages in the transcripts I looked to the work of Saldana, (2009) and coded in four categories: *in vivo*, descriptive, process and emotion/values. It was in the *process* and *emotive* categorizations that similar themes existed. Within the action of memoeing about these codes found in *process* and *emotion*, and with the consideration of my notes, I then established the over-arching themes of resistance, reflection, reemergence, revitalization and redemption and resurgence. Within

all of that was the infusion of an inductive analysis that provided me with the foundational understanding of *Woman as Land – Woman as Healer*. A significant theme emerged as I recognized each of the women to be witnesses to the other themes of their lives.

As I categorized or themed relevant constructs found within the data, I looked deeper into the languages, traditions and ceremonial protocols provided by the Aboriginal women in this study. I tried to give particular attention to the reporting of Indigenous terminology as I found the nuances, words, phrases and understandings of Indigenous women needed much more than a “translation”. As a researcher, I gave my attention to this by seeking participant validation, particularly in the understanding of context and in the complexity of meaning within the languages of Denesuline, Michif, Cree and Inuktitut. These languages are distinct from each other; however, it is known that Indigenous meanings have significant similarities. Significant attention to inductive coding is required when the traditions and languages of four nations potentially mix within the thematic analysis. When the participants used words or phrases within their Indigenous languages—Denesuline, Cree, Inuktitut, or Michif—it was up to me as the principal researcher and writer of the dissertation, to ensure I had understood the full meaning. I made efforts to ensure these meanings are correctly reported by asking for the critical feedback in the readings of transcripts and notes and the re-hearing of the audiotape. In addition, Cree scholars and knowledge keepers were consulted to ensure the nuances and understandings of specific words or phrases were used in the correct context. Each participant was given opportunity to verify the validity and accuracy of the interpreted data she initially provided.

Each participant had the opportunity to review the data transcribed following the *Storywork* interview, so she could make changes to the responses and ensure all of her identifying quotes were verified for inclusion in the thesis. As this research study supports collaboration and continuous comparative coding, each participant was given ongoing opportunities to validate personal data. I made myself available by telephone or email should a participant want to speak about her responses in the *Storywork* (via questionnaires, interview transcript and my written documentation of their stories), or if she had additional questions. As the women of these Nations are interwoven and interconnected by the Indigenous principle of ontological relationality and their collective deconstruction of colonization, this ongoing communication was a critical piece of the analysis. This asking of permission and the use of preferred language, phrases, words and expressions is a measure of respect and accountability to the Indigenous community by the researcher. Martin (2003) asserts that this reporting and asking for validation is essential to the maintenance of the relationship between the Indigenous participant, her community and the researcher.

Partnership Building and Reciprocity

The analysis of an Indigenous research methodology requires the researcher to search deeply for a reflective practice as she continues to respect the principle of relationality. It is possible each member may encounter some emotional trauma with the telling of her personal story. As these participants potentially knew the other participants within the research study, I believed they must have access to each other. This access created a collective of “strong women voices” and I am sure it will lead to a potential network to support futuristic Indigenous research. This process not only allowed these Indigenous

women the opportunity to speak with the researcher and each other, it gave a needed and protective space for their individual truths. The beauty and transparency of this research process is in itself a critical system of Indigenous networking that is necessary for re-claiming, supporting and de-briefing. As stated previously, as researchers, we are responsible for every action we take within the research process. Our ongoing relationship with each participant, and potentially her kinship, is critical to our ethical conduct. The evolution of this study seeks to honour and maintain the Indigenous principle of relationality.

Reciprocity

When one instigates research participation with Indigenous peoples, she is bound to the protocols defined within the foundation of reciprocity. I believe I met this principle by offering of a gift to each member at the beginning of this study. When this study concludes, my personal thanks will be extended to all. In addition to viewing this commitment as an offering within the ceremony of research, I look to the leadership of Kovach (2010, 2009) who believes reciprocity is much more than a gift. It implies that you live your life in a way that nurtures relationships: “you cannot decontextualize your life from your research” (Kovach, personal conversation, 2010). This means you must proceed with authenticity and integrity.

I have learned from Margaret Kovach that it is essential to engage in purposeful work—work that authentically supports members, and work which is meaningful and useful within Indigenous communities. When you propose a partnership for continued dialogue and evolutionary research possibilities, you must ensure the principles of *Tapowakeythi tamowin* (truth), *Kisewatisowin* (kindness), *Asakiwin* (sharing/caring) and

Tapwiwin (honesty) are in place (Michell, 2005). The relationship that is built with your participants has far reaching effects. During the research process, I worked to honour the voices and languages of each participant by giving my word to ensure the nuances, words and phrases within specific Indigenous languages are accurately described, and so to that the context of quotes cited reflect the knowings and wisdoms of these Aboriginal women.

As a researcher who follows the principles of Indigenous research methodologies, one must give back in an authentic way that shows true reciprocity. The ongoing care of the previous and newly formed relationships must be carried forth through your own means of sharing and gratitude. As a researcher, I was obligated to discover what I must learn and do in order to become familiar with Indigenous protocols and ceremonies of reciprocity within the traditions of the Denesuline, the Cree, The Inuit and the Métis. Whether that means offering tobacco or cloth or some other gift, the researcher is obligated to understand what is required. I will continue to do all I can to ensure the long-term reciprocity required within Indigenous communities is honoured. In addition to this relational longevity and commitment, I will gift each participant a copy of my dissertation upon the awarding of my degree.

Conclusion

The *Storywork of Kanawayhitowin* exists as a methodological framework for this Indigenous research study. As an overarching framework, *Kanawayhitowin* provides the context of caring when pursuing the knowledges of Indigenous women. It also defines the concern that must be afforded to the issue of exploring environmental racism within Indigenous communities, and it lends credibility to the protection of a network of women's voices found in the Aboriginal Nations of Canada. My sensibilities, life work

and relationships define and center my research journey as I search for realities, further questions, and potential solutions for the wellness of Indigenous peoples and *Mother Earth*. As the principal researcher of this study, I took responsibility for following principles of ethical research as defined by Castellano (2004) in *Ethics of Aboriginal Research*. In that, I honour the participants of this research and consider these Aboriginal women, my colleagues and my relations. Their willingness to participate shows the extent of concern Indigenous women have for their kinships and all *Earth* entities.

The *Storywork of Kanawayhitowin* exists as a stronghold of vision in the reclaiming of Indigenous knowledge, women's knowledge and *Mother Earth's* knowledge. As I look to the leadership of Indigenous women in the reclaiming and resurgence of Aboriginal identities, self-determinations and *Earth* justices, I know their collective of "strong Indigenous women's voices" will lead in the dismantling of environmental racism, as well as add to the critical transformation work of other Indigenous leaders and scholars.

It is my hope this research will have a lasting and evolutionary effect long after it is complete. I am sure it will exist as a medium for further academic and investigative research and pedagogical development. Most importantly, it will exist as a foundation of hope for Indigenous women as they provide direction for the Aboriginal youth of Canada. As a critical and emancipatory piece of research, I envision this work as part of my own *environmental justice* and I give gratitude and thanks to all those who have guided me on this journey. *Marci!*

Chapter IV: “Storywork” of the Sisters

The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.

Thomas King

The Okanagan storyteller Jeanette Armstrong tells us that

Through my language I understand I am being spoken to,

I am not the speaker.

The words are coming from many tongues and mouths

of Okanagan people and the land around them.

I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form

I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns.

(Armstrong as cited in King, 2003, p. 2.)

As Jeannette Armstrong reminds me, “I am the listener” and in this *Storywork* research, I am conscious of the fact I am “re-telling the story in different patterns” (Armstrong in King, 2003, p. 2). It is with this in mind that I pay close attention to the work of Jo-anne Archibald (2008) who coined the phenomena of *Storywork* in her seminal research with Coast Salish Elders and storytellers. The principles outlined within the symbolism of traditional cedar basket weaving and its relationship with her peoples depict a powerful metaphor leading educators to a heart and soul reflection, that necessary for the understanding of societal transformation. Although on the surface, the metaphor exhibits an entity projecting the sustainability of Indigenous peoples, it extends beyond this as Archibald advances *Storywork* as an Indigenous research methodology and an analytical tool that acts as powerful antidote to the contemporary challenges found in schools and communities.

“The words *story* and *work* together signal the importance of undertaking the educational and research work of making meaning through stories, whether they are traditional or lived experience stories” (Archibald, 2008b, p. 373). The symbolism of the cedar pieces reminds me of the women of *Sisters*. Archibald (2008b) shares this thought: “the pieces of cedar sometimes stand alone, and sometimes they lose their distinctiveness and form a design” (p. 373). And so it is in this *Storywork* and the stories of each of the Sisters; sometimes they “are distinguishable as separate entities, and sometimes they are bound together,” (Archibald, 2008b, p. 373). As I relate the stories of the Aboriginal women who have gifted me throughout this research journey, I will reflect on that significance as I am guided by the seven Indigenous teachings of *respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy* as found within Archibald’s “*Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*” (Archibald, 2008).

By unearthing the characteristics, ethical actions, and directives of the eight Aboriginal women who lead others in the work of healing and ecological justice while they address realities of environmental racism, I present their life works and the leadership styles of each woman as she looks for peace and justice. In following the guidelines of Archibald (2008), I have come to an understanding of how I might present the stories of the eight Indigenous women in *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin*.

Woman as Land

Through this work and my newly formed and strengthened relationships, in the unearthing and dissection of words, phrases and stories, and through the visiting of places, times, traditions, events and peoples, I have found the imagery of this *Earth*, and those images within traditional lands, as ever changing spiritual, physical and emotional

entities. These images stand foremost in my heart and mind. It was this realization that urged me to seek a metaphorical understanding of *woman as land* and through this I was alerted to Kolodny's work and her book, *Lay of the Land* (1975). Until recently, I was unable to find many examples of this kind of analysis, and what I did find was presented from a western and privileged worldview, from a view of western eco-feminism.

Although the contextualization of Indigenous principles is far removed from Kolodny's work (1975), her's being a critical metaphorical analysis of how land is depicted as feminine, weak, and something to be dominated, I believe her understanding of *woman* in the contextualization of land is one that must be considered, and it is one that must be re-storied.

This re-storying of *woman as land* is based on the premise that woman, like land, is strong, resilient, intelligent, organic, strategic, spiritual, fertile, compassionate and nurturing. And when hurt, damaged or dislocated, she can re-emerge and regain her place through revitalization, and then at last, she can be redeemed through her own resurgence. Woman has a relationship with land in that she is a mirror of that land (LaDuke, 2004). When compared to the creatures of the earth and the sustainability of all other living things, women too, are impacted by activities that touch, soothe or hurt the specific eco-systems they live within. The women in this *Storywork* have moved through the stages of resistance, reflection, re-emergence and revitalization to come to a place of redemption. They have done this on the lands of the boreal, the barrens, the tundra and the parkland as they have adapted to the "lay of the land", that of which has sustained their people for a millennia. Winona LaDuke, a Native American woman, has long honoured the wisdoms of *Earth* women and she reminds all, "Our bodies are a mirror of

our mother, and of Mother Earth. And so we walk, healthy, beautiful, vibrant, voluptuous through the minefield of industrialism!” (LaDuke, 2004, forward). The women in this study recognize that land is more than trees and sands, muskeg and mosses, more than tundra and perma frost, and that land is a “physical mass called our bodies” (LaDuke, 2013, forward). These women are one and the same as the land they are from. In some instances they see themselves as one and the same as the other earth life, which is sustained by that land. The correlation of land wellness and human wellness is not new; it has existed through time immemorial. With this Indigenous re-story, I honour the counter narratives of the women who have shared their *Storywork*.

The Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin

The Plains Cree word, *Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin*, has multiple meanings and as I learned more about the complexities within it, I recognized how relevant it was in defining the women of this study, and in particular, the work they have done and continue to do. Elder Marie Adam, who is a *Treaty 8* Denesuline woman, asked me in one of our telephone conversations, “What does that Cree word mean?” and “How do you pronounce it?” She expressed an interest in how I chose it and why I applied it to the collective Indigeneity and solidarity of the women in this study. I told her I first heard the word from Yvonne Vizina and understood it to mean resilience, and at that time, I intuitively felt it was a fitting word to use for this work. It was also a word of *Nēhiyaw pīkiskwēwin* (the Cree language) and the ancestral language of Elder Stella Blackbird, who was first among Indigenous women to recognize my relationality, and to acknowledge it and extend her acceptance as she showed me that I too was “one of them”. Upon further investigation, I found this word with multiple complexities held the

depth of what I thought these women embodied. I told Marie what I had learned from several Elders, traditional peoples, and Cree linguists including Elder Stella Blackbird, Chief Tammy Cook-Searson, Elder Joseph Naytowhow, Métis/Cree educator Laura Burnouf and Elder Stan Wilson:

Strong willed. Nothing can interfere with your actions (Blackbird, 2013).

I have been told that the word means “resilience, great patience, stubbornness even” and a fortitude to keep on trying and never give up. This means a person will have a lot of resilience (Burnouf, 2012).

The person has the ability to see things through and has enough perseverance to make it through times of turmoil and hardship. [It implies that] one has the will to keep on going (Cook-Searson, 2013).

Definitely resilience, patience. One must be strong in character to have this quality. Will power certainly fits as well. Definitely perseverance (Naytowhow, 2013).

It means patience, stick-to-it ness, persistence, striving, unswerving mind...*Sasophita* is the not letting go part and the *tahimowin*³ is the strong mind part. It seems that this word is referring to relationships that are connected to especially women and could mean “to be long suffering” and to be able to overlook slights (Wilson, 2013).

The *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyih tamowin* makes up a collective of eight vibrant women from four distinct Indigenous nations within the geographical and political boundaries known as Canada. The women of these nations, the Métis, Inuit, Denesuline and Cree, have

³ The Swampy Cree words gifted by Elder Stan Wilson are spelled phonetically to reflect the local dialect and wishes of the Elders.

come to this work through my invitation, however, also through the relationality found within Indigenous knowledge, and I believe the transference of *Wahtokowin* to me through the love of Elder Stella Blackbird. It has been said when one follows the protocols within Indigenous research, there are no mistakes regarding the direction one takes. I believe this to be true. I was in relationship with four of the women prior to the study and knew of the work of the other four through colleagues and my own research regarding residential schools, gendered self-determination, youth wellness, environmental racism, plant medicine and cultural ceremony, Indigenous science and ecological justice.

The women of this group make up a collective of wisdom keepers who are Elders, medicine women, chiefs, negotiators, policy analysts, educators and environmentalists. They are daughters of ancient tradition and their origins have given them a lived experience of life on the land. In this collective story, *woman as land*, moves beyond a metaphor to a lived experience that infuses the characteristics of reality, physicality, and spirituality into a singular living and breathing entity, one that is adaptable and creative, supple yet lean, strong and simultaneously gentle, as she journeys for peace and wellness.

Of Indigenization and Identity

In my analysis, the adaption of Indigeneity as a foundational pillar allows both Indigenous women and the land to be honoured, respected, protected and nurtured simultaneously, as a reverberating phenomenon, a *conscientization* (Freire, 1970), that which gives a transference of wellness to Indigenous kinships and *Mother Earth*. In a sense, Indigeneity is a field of governance, a knowledge and an identity, which is above all intellectual and political (Altamirano-Jimenez, 2014). It is this foundation that supports the contextualization of *woman as land*, and as I project the words of these eight

Indigenous women, I honour each of them as I make every effort to work in a spirit of reverence and respect as I proceed.

Defining Indigeneity is a complex matter, however, communities, kinships, tribes, states, the *United Nations* and even the World Bank have adapted and follow a conceptualization of this critical knowledge:

Indigenous Peoples can be identified in particular geographical areas by the presence in varying degrees of the following characteristics:

- a) close attachment to ancestral territories and to the natural resources in these areas;
- b) self-identification and identification by others as members of a distinct cultural group;
- c) an indigenous language, often different from the national language;
- d) presence of customary social and political institutions; and
- e) primarily subsistence-oriented production.

(World Bank, 1991)

By drawing attention to this definition, one understands traditional lands, ecological sustainability, traditional ceremony and custom, Indigenous language, and the social and political structures, whether matriarchal, matrilineal, egalitarian or patriarchal, are necessary components of Indigeneity and Indigenous kinships. Most important is the concept of self-identification and its relational context to all peoples Indigenous. This reflection is especially important for me as the primary researcher, and although I do refer to the women in this study as participants, I hold these women in my heart as colleagues, friends and relations. *They are my relations. We are related.* It is this ability for one that is Indigenous, or in my case, Métis, to be able to identify and connect with other Indigenous peoples in a process consciously guided by intuition and spirit. It was

this gift and the recognition of my Indigeneity by Elder Stella Blackbird that allowed me to see beyond the western ideologies of academia and to then gain access to this work. I acknowledge the privilege of all the relationships in this work, especially those with my participants and traditional knowledge keepers and their kinships, and those with my committee members. *Marci.*

A pan-Aboriginal view and a corresponding value system does not constitute the voices of those in this research study, however, by grouping women from similar Indigenous knowledge systems together, I have been permitted to learn from these distinct Indigenous kinships by seeking a consensus of understanding from the women who are Métis, and those who are Cree, Denesuline and Inuit. In using the definition presented by the World Bank, I will attempt to relay the stories of Marie Adam, Stella Blackbird, Ila Bussidor, Tammy Cook-Searson, Rose Richardson, Joan Scottie, Yvonne Vizina and Jennifer Watkins in a good way, a way in which their spirit and intellect is honoured and elated, a way in which all peoples will see and hear their teachings, those teachings which I believe are at the center of their beings and in their hearts.

Indigeneity, Embodiment and Voice

*I was born the privileged skin.
And my eyes are bright, bright brown
You'd never know there is Métis blood
Raging underground
Let me tell you a story about a revelation
It's not the colour of a nation that holds a nation's pride
It's imagination.
It's imagination inside.*

(Menard, A. as cited in King, 2003, p. 62)

In the above quote, Andrea Menard, reminds me of my own past and the need to grasp the revelation of imagination when reflecting upon my position as I bring the

breathing, living words of the sisters to fruition. In coming to an understanding of how the positionality of being Métis affects my worldview through the scope of this research around environmental racism and the search for justice, I had this thought: “the ambiguity of being Métis is difficult for some, confusing for others, painful for many, but within in it there is great hope.” Although Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo, (2009) describe métissage as “a way of merging or blurring ... identities,” (p.9) and although this blurring may diminish one view, or perhaps another, it seems to me the ambiguity of this merging grants a freedom to the Métis that other Indigenous peoples may not experience. I believe this “blurring” may be a bridging of fertile discourses, and through creative processes and reasoned positioning, it gives way to “an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical practice” (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p.9).

Métis scholar, Adam Gaudry (2013) is critical of those presenting the myth of métissage. In this discourse, he believes individuals *holding* power, including Ralston Saul, have misrepresented the Métis in their literary analysis. He is particularly offended by Saul’s claim that Canada is a métis civilization. I would argue, as does Gaudry (2013), that being Métis and presenting métissage as a counter-narrative is a much more complex reality than the bold whitewashing Jennifer Reid and John Ralston Saul present. The Métis identity needs much more authentication and frankly, it requires an understanding of blood memory, historical colonization, and through all of the land living experienced, it needs an Indigenous language weaving through the Métis homeland of tradition, culture, music, and spirituality. Here Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo (2009) present métissage as a counter narrative in the search for identity:

We take *métissage* as a *counternarrative* to the grand narrative of our times, a site of writing and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages, particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy, and pedagogical practice. Our writing illustrates *métissage* as an artful research praxis that mixes binaries such as colonized with colonizer, local with global, East with West, North and South, particular with universal, feminine with masculine, vernacular with literate, and theory with practice. We braid strands of place and space, memory and history, ancestry and (mixed) race, language and literacy, familiar and strange, with the strands of tradition, ambiguity, becoming, (re) creation, and renewal into a *métissage*. (p. 9).

In a further analysis, the Métis flag, the intertwining of the infinity, a joining of the two, and the existence of forever as symbolized by this infinity, shows the sustainability of this distinct Indigenous nation known as the Métis. The Métis homelands spread throughout our country, some say it originates in the Red River Valley of Manitoba, and pays homage to a governance built on a pillar of matriarchy. Donald's work (2009) and his analysis of *métissage* falls within the life experiences of many Métis leaders including Rose Richardson and Yvonne Vizina. I believe his explorative comparisons and contrasts of colonial and Indigenous narratives could be infused into their life stories and their embodiment of *Métissage*. My recognition and acceptance of *Métissage* as counter-narrative, or a re-storying of life, prompts me to begin with the stories of my Métis sisters, Yvonne Vizina and Elder Rose Richardson.

Women of *Wiichihwayshinawn*

Wiichihwayshinawn is the Michif word that personifies Rose Richardson and Yvonne Vizina. Within that word is the understanding of métissage, as it seems to me, it fortifies the merging of the strengths and sensibilities that one acquires as a helper. As natural mediators of two peoples, these women have their feet on the land and their heads in the skies. They are helpers. I have the great privilege of telling their stories and I am proud to share their ancestral roots. Adam Gaudry's work in the analysis of métissage centers the truth of the Métis in this way:

Riel's all-consuming goal, as well as the central aspiration of his people was the protection of their independent nationhood (Boyden 2011). While it is true that Riel "often depicts himself and his people as the natural mediators between their two ancestral groups" (Braz 2003, p. 205), Riel was also critical about the colonial impulses of the Canadian project, which, on the ground, were disrupting the lives of his people. His role as a cultural mediator was heavily circumscribed by Canadian injustice, and his mediation was always for the benefit of his people, and not necessarily for the benefit of Canada. In his *Last Memoir*, he gives a vivid example of his understanding of the Métis relationship to Canada: "What did the Government do? It laid its hands on the land of the Métis as if it were its own. By this one act it showed its plan to defraud them of their future. It even placed their present condition in jeopardy. For not only did it take the land from under their feet, it even took away their right to use it." (Riel, 1982, p.205 in Gaudry, 2013, p. 76).

The corresponding analysis of Riel's true purpose can be situated within the life works of Richardson and Vizina. Both women have utilized political praxis to advance the position of the Métis, nationally and internationally, in their fight for Métis land rights, Indigenous sovereignty, biodiversity protections, and youth engagement. There is a term presented by Mi'kmaq Elder, Albert Marshall, which fits the role of Vizina and Richardson. *Etuaptmuk*, which means, "two-eyed seeing" (Bartlett, 2011; Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2009) is about bringing our different ways of knowing, our western ways and our Indigenous ways, together to inspire and motivate people to live a good life. The "two-eyed seeing" of the Métis is a natural occurrence, and for both Rose and Yvonne, their intellect, spirit, emotion, and physicality are lived with one eye on western ideologies, and the other on Indigenous traditionalism. It is this merging of the "two eyes" that brings these women to authentic actions—that of how to best do something for positive change. In Albert's words,

"Two-Eyed Seeing" is hard to convey to academics, as it does not fit into any particular subject area or discipline. Rather, it is about life: what you do, what kind of responsibilities you have, how you should live while on Earth ... i.e., a guiding principle that covers all aspects of our lives: social, economic, environmental, etc. The advantage of "Two-Eyed Seeing" is that you are always fine tuning your mind into different places at once, you are always looking for another perspective and better way of doing things (Institute for Integrative Science and Health, 2014, para 14).

Albert also extends this understanding to another Mi'kmaw word that emulates both Rose and Yvonne's lives in respect to the interdependency found in ecology and land living:

Netukulimk, especially when the context involves our Earth Mother. *Netukulimk* is a Mi'kmaw understanding that, in Albert's words, "takes you into a place where you are very conscious of how the human two-leggeds are interdependent and interconnective with the natural world ... this philosophy / ideology is so ingrained in your subconscious that you are constantly aware of not creating an imbalance" (Institute for Integrative Science and Health, 2014, para 12).

The principles of *Netukulimk*: co-existence, interrelatedness, interconnectedness and community spirit are visible in the lives of Rose and Yvonne. These principles extend to the relationships we have with others, and the relationship we have with *Mother Earth* and all her entities. Both women have extended their spirits of generosity, words of wisdom and their depth of ceremony to me.

Rose Richardson, a Métis Elder, activist, and medicine woman, has long been under the radar of governments and patriarchal landowners. Her reputation as a tenacious mystic came to me through my own research and my guidance to seek those working with plant medicines. When I contacted Rose about my research she said she knew I was going to call her and when I met Elder Rose Richardson in person, for the first time in January of 2013, I recognized the gift she had given me. I feel blessed to have a relationship with a woman of great humour, wise knowings, a woman who speaks to plants and animals and one who has lived through hardship and poverty; a spirit who came through a childhood of hurt and shame to the other side of knowing who she is as a Métis woman. The comfort I felt in her home as she fed me her homemade hamburger soup and bannock was immense. Then I had no idea of our commonalities, but an easy

conversation soon showed me that my mother's family make-up of the dominate French Catholic blood resonated in Rose's blood too.

The history of the Métis in Green Lake, Saskatchewan is a story that is unfamiliar to many Canadians. With this history dating back to the 1700's, and with the infusion of the fur trade, the Métis of Green Lake had well-established connections with those of Fort Carleton, Batoche, Cumberland House and Ile-a-la Crosse during these early years. In those days, as a Métis stronghold, the community of Green Lake flourished, and as the Government of Saskatchewan and the Roman Catholic Church viewed it as an *assimilation* possibility, in the 1930's a Métis farming or "rehabilitation" colony was established here. In doing this, these authorities removed the Métis from the south and from the road allowance communities of which many Métis were a part, and a new history was born. One sees clearly how this initiative created a limited Métis base in the south of our province and how the Green Lake of today is identified as a historical Métis center. Today, Rose Richardson is a proud Métis woman. She ensures all who meet her know of this history, the positives and the negatives, and most importantly, the fact that the Green Lake of today is without a doubt, a Métis settlement. She has lived here since she was a child and her home and the infamous Keewatin Junction Station are situated where the parkland meets the boreal forest in the northwest of Saskatchewan.

Not only is Rose Richardson a gifted and spirit-guided medicine person, she is an ambassador for the Métis and the Métis Nation. She has worked all her life to protect and save Métis lands in Saskatchewan, and interestingly enough, she is currently one of the largest landowners in the Green Lake area. She is concerned about the forestry practices of current industries, the demise of natural habitats, and the disappearance and alteration

of plant and animal species. As she recognizes the conflict and some of the misunderstandings of First Nations, Métis and non-aboriginal peoples, she works incessantly to advance collaboration and new thinking among all communities, albeit never forgetting that the inherent rights of the Métis and the protection of sustainable lands are her focus. This protection of Métis culture, land, language and children is her lifework. In doing this work, she and her husband, Ric Richardson, play a large role in the education and guidance of others, speaking to those in schools, institutions, churches, agricultural communities, environmental platforms, and within government to guide others to a place of vision, consensus, cooperative sustainability and health. In addition to all of this public work, they are the proprietors of Keewatin Junction Station, a Métis historical center and restaurant serving northerners and other visitors daily. Rose is a political player that understands the current principles of our “Canadianized” culture and with one eye on western ideologies, she is cognizant of what she must do to protect her own Green Lake Métis homeland from exploitation. On more than one occasion she has been met resistance, however, her vast knowledges, persistence, and spiritual and ceremonial depth reverberate in the outcome of her own health and her resilience as a Métis woman. Richardson has this to share:

Oh, we went to the village council and said “there’s this piece of land, just quite a few acres where people for generations have picked rat root; they come from all over to pick rat root in this specific area”. And we said, “We want that protected”. They ended up leasing it out to a farmer anyway who fenced the area and let his cattle in there. And the spirits came in and all was covered with water, nothing grows, and he still can’t keep his cattle there.

See, the thing is, government is keeping us divided because there are a lot of resources there. You go into some areas and you can actually find garnets in the rocks. And the thing is, just at the end of the field as you leave, it's my land. The very end of it has a well that was an oil well that had been dug and capped. We ran into the guy maybe about twenty years ago and he said, "You know we were drilling in Green Lake and there's an unresolved land issue," he said "we found oil," he said "but it was capped. We capped it and left through the night," he said. Because it was a Métis settlement. They couldn't very well come in.

Although Rose Richardson recognizes the oppression of the Métis as a peoples, she protects her own health and the sustainability of her family like a traditional Métis woman would. She and many other Elders, those who are considered the wisdom keepers, recognize the importance of building a personal reserve while learning to share a leadership that promotes true self-determination. She speaks of this history and projects an understanding of why others need to embrace Métissage:

A lot of work has to be done. But at one time this was a really strong community where people were really strong and proud. But then when they started taking away everything, people had no income and they practically didn't have a land base. People are saying "ok," people come and they say, "Well this is Métis land, isn't it?" This is Métis land! And we should fight for our land; we should take the government to court because this land was set aside for the Métis.

And they say "Rose, we should do something about it". And I say "You know what. I fought that; I fought for the land a long time. It's highly unlikely that I should be the one fighting when I have over 150 acres of land under private

ownership. It should be you fighting for the land and I will back you up. But you have to do it. And first of all, why would you be fighting for the land, if you believe that this is Métis land, then use it. Start making gardens. You know there is a shortage of housing. Lets go out and let's get 50 trees, we'll all cut one down, we'll all bring it home. There'll be absolutely there'll be no way they can take us to court for cutting down one tree each. And then we'll build houses and we can do that because this is Métis land". But people have a hard time understanding that and they became a municipality and you can't be a Métis community, a settlement, and be part of the municipal government at the same time.

Both the First Nations and white landowners near Rose Richardson's Métis lands see her as a contumacious woman, however, her vision as a "two-eyed" trickster gives her access to both western and Indigenous ideologies and knowledge systems of protection. This and her tenacity keep her and her family alive and well:

Yeah and I talk to individual people but unless people are prepared to do something about it then we can't do it alone. And people say, "I wish this would get turned into a reserve; we won't have any problem with your land because you have 150 acres of land". I said "If this gets turns into a reserve, you will have to buy that land off of me". I didn't get that land for nothing. I bought it. You know, when I worked, all my earnings always went into buildings and land. I worked all my life.

As her blood memory takes the linguistic and cultural wisdom of her ancestors to today's contemporary world, it could be said Rose Richardson bleeds Métis. Fluency in French, English, Cree and Michif compounds her Métissage as she maneuverers through diverse kinships and bridges cultural discord between the *white man and the native*. Elder Rose

Richardson's persona, psyche and physicality epitomize the ingrained value of hard work, the land work of planting and harvesting, and the understanding, honouring and using of plant medicines in a good way. It seems this land living is at the heart of her Métissage. Like Aldo Leopold, Rose understands the land, not just as a commodity; it exists as a living breathing self-producing woman, just as she is. As she recognizes the many abuses the Métis homeland and her peoples have endured, I believe, like Leopold, she understands that "when we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect" (Leopold, 1949, viii). When the mystic Rose walks among the willows with the whitetail deer and the wolves, she will speak to them just as she speaks to you and I. I have come to know that Rose Richardson is prophetic, wise and loving; she is a mystic like no other, she is *woman as land*.

Yvonne Vizina became my relation when she returned from working with the Métis Nation Council in Ottawa to fill a new role as Associate Director of the Aboriginal Education Research Centre, University of Saskatchewan in 2005. I remember meeting her the previous year in a class I began taking with Dr. Don Cochrane, a seasoned professor in Educational Foundations. Her storytelling voice, the diction and the pausing, drew my attention as did her story of breathing in solitude with the forest, and how on one occasion, a white-tailed deer alerted her to a newborn fawn that was in trouble. It only took a moment to untangle the trapped baby, but unspoken communication, intuitive understandings and compassion take much longer to learn and retain in everyday life. I have learned traditional teachings are meant for self-development and for extending those teachings to others, both human and non-human. I am reminded that the fawn engenders joyful curiosity and a reflective hesitancy speckled with a new found freedom. This story

reminded me of Yvonne's own positionality and how she too is free and fearless, and curious and cautious at the same time.

I believe her journey to the counter-narrative of Métissage became most clear to her when she became a student studying in SUNTEP. This role provided her the courage to wear her Métis smile and come forth:

I grew up in East Central Saskatchewan in a little community called Reserve. It's about 30 minutes south of Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan. So it's right near the border about an hour from the Pas, Manitoba. And if you look at a map, I often laughingly refer to it as area 51 because there is almost no roads or development out there. Lots of good bush country, it's really beautiful really hilly, lakes, so consequently people were hunters out there.

I always had a really good relationship with my dad; I think the two of us in our family were probably closer than anyone. And so, I just used to admire who he was because I think even as child you admire people that you innately know somehow that you're like, or have a tendency to be like. I was introverted, always liked to read, be by myself, play in the bush and that kind of stuff. So for me, that was a kind of leadership that I thought was worthwhile. You did things well. You didn't have to talk about it, didn't have to brag about it. You didn't have to have a big group of people with you all the time when you were doing something. You just chose something and you did it well. And so for me, I think that still has a big echo in my life.

She speaks of the underground position of being Métis, the complications of this identity, and the secrecy and shame that is sometimes projected upon children. In her case, overt

racism at a time when it was not concealed in communities or families overpowered the connection to her Indigenous relations. She reflects:

If you don't have access to your cultural traditions, if there isn't someone actively teaching them, then in fact there is another force that is pushing you away from knowing that information, either by saturation in another culture or simply by inferring that it's a shame thing, you shouldn't claim that as your own identity. So, for me that was the politicization of my identity, I think.

But in my recollection that we were told, and I don't remember being told why, when we moved from Reserve, we were told not to say where we were from, not to reveal our background. When you're a young person, you don't question those kinds of things, you just do as you're told and you don't talk, you clam up. Before I went to SUNTEP, I hardly talked; I was a very quiet person. So the question about identity as an Indigenous woman and leadership, that was a spring board to me to basically, it was like somebody peeled off this smothering layer, it was like oh, ok I can breath now. And realizing that you want to follow your heart in whatever it is that you want to do with your life, it's your heart that directs you, I think more than your intellect.

Today, in her work with panels, councils and committees focused on biodiversity and Indigenous rights, Vizina remains humble. Her experience resonates with mine, in that I am currently one of a handful of my grandmothers' grandchildren and great-grandchildren with a graduate degree:

But there was no possible way I would have ever went to university without that support from the Métis community. Being the first person in either side of my

family to ever get a degree was a big thing for me. And so I chose, after teaching for a couple of years to go work for the Métis Nation.

Like Rose Richardson she maneuvers in a political minefield and does it with grace and skill. The concept of *Etuaptmumk*, “two-eyed seeing” is apparent in helping Yvonne Vizina build consensus and advance what she knows as her heart work:

Well it’s interesting because you have to learn how to navigate in multiple worlds. I mean, as a Métis person, you never criticize your First Nations ancestors and you never criticize your white ancestors. You sort of have to go, “oh yeah well, oh, ok”. In some ways you become accustomed to that, so maybe that does play a role in being able to effectively collaborate with other people who are not like you.

I was very lucky to have learned a great many things from Saulteaux Elder Danny Musqua and Nakota Elder Vickie Wilson and a number of other Elders who are near and dear to my heart. Some have passed away now. But like a true Métis I have a little bit of mixed up everything in my thinking but I love it. I think everyone’s like that too, but it’s just that as Métis we can sort of openly be proud of that. Whereas as with some other nations, if you’re Dakota, you would say, “Well I’m Dakota and I only think Dakota”. But with Métis we can pretty much think the best of everything and run.

Rose and Yvonne are exceptional helpers, or in Michif, they are *Wiichihiwayshinawn*. I have quietly observed Yvonne for years, bent over yet another policy document, editing other leaders and scholars’ works, and I have watched her peaceful conversations with environmentalists and scientists from around the world, but most importantly, I have seen

her reach out to and support Elders and children of all nations. It is her love of the people and the land that strikes a chord within my heart. This soft-spoken Métis woman knows how to separate the wheat from the chaff and she knows how to sit in the forest with the fawns. Her embodiment, her stature and her presence defines *woman as land*. In all that she is and does, she is very clear about whom she is helping. I believe all of her grounding and ability to critically reflect came to her in her childhood:

As a child, I played in the bush (as we call it) every day. Picked wild strawberries, blueberries, and cranberries. Ate hazelnuts off the bush, peeled the prickly skin off and cracked them with our teeth. Of course, my dad and brother hunted and fished and mom grew a garden every year so we had plenty. I am so grateful for having those memories. Hardly any food was purchased from the local store. Now, I live in the city and for the past 20 years or so have taken daily refuge down at the Saskatchewan River with my dogs. There are few places that are not fenced off. I often feel like a prisoner in the city because there is almost nowhere left to go that isn't fenced to keep you in the city.

I remember meeting Elder Rose Richardson last June when she and her husband Ric were recruited as chefs and ambassadors of the Métis for the *Half Breed Ball*, a gala dinner to host the global delegates of the *Native American and Indigenous Studies Association* (NAISA) conference. When a call out from Elder Maria Campbell came for cook *extraordinaire*, that was a request that could not be refused. The next month, in the midst of the parkland prairie of Batoche, after I hugged her at the historical *Repatriation of the Bell of Batoche* in July of 2013, I watched as she and her husband greeted people on their Métis homelands. Her regality and graciousness shone in these interactions. As

I observed her again in November of this same year at the *Saskatchewan Citizens' Hearings on Climate Change* in Saskatoon, I recognized then the embodiment of her traditional knowledge and the depth of her spirit. Her busy schedule as a speaker and educator and her role as chief cook at Keewatin Junction Station merges with family interactions gifted to her own five children and grandchildren. It seems it does not matter if Rose Richardson is cooking you bannock or burgers in her kitchen or carrying out a function such as Ambassador at *Back to Batoche*. Every interaction that comes forth from this woman is graced with kindness and thought, every person is valued, and every action, private and public, holds equality. As Rose Richardson embodies *Wiichihiwayshinawn*, she personifies more than we will ever understand through our physical observations, and like *Mother Earth*, this *woman as land* is both healer and protector.

The Women *Askiwina*

Askewina is the Cree word that means “over the years” (Cuthand, 2007) and it is this word that describes the ancestral vitality of both Elder Stella Blackbird and Chief Tammy Cook-Searson. For Blackbird and Cook-Searson, their Cree world, as described by Doug Cuthand (2007), is about a re-storying of history, traditionalism, resilience, and Indigenous knowledge, while keeping a close watch on the contemporary positions of their kinships and youth. As women who have filled the roles of *Kôhkom* (grandmother) and *Kitânis* (daughter), both have lived larger than life as proud Cree traditionalists and as women who find comfort in their own skins. They are women who understand hurt, women who have witnessed the deaths of their own children and other mothers' children, women who know how to both comfort and confront; they are women who lead through

healing, teaching and peaceful negotiation. These two women live each day with vision and vitality and so with reverence and respect, I will do my best to bring their stories to life on these pages.

I realized quite a few years ago that I am of one the privileged. More than six years ago, I attended a healing circle for breast cancer survivors, not because I wanted to, not because I was intent on sharing, not because I was brave, but because I thought I should, and I thought seeing and hearing the Elders might help me forgive and heal. Although I had no idea this gathering would lead to one of the most profound experiences of my life, it did. I can say I thank *Manitou* often for this great privilege, as it was here that Elder Stella Blackbird chose me. It was this meeting, I believe, that opened my heart and mind to the research in which I am currently engaged. At that gathering, Elder Stella Blackbird guided me to follow her from the healing circle to her own space and she turned to me and whispered, “I am connected to you and I am going to help you.” I laughed through my tears, smiled and told her, “You look like my grandma, but not my Métis grandma.” Years later Stella told me, “Right away I was attracted to you, when I looked at you. Just like my heart was going to bust when you were into that lady’s story.” I commented on my past sadness, and the physical, emotional and psychological hurt I felt for the woman speaking of her own confrontation with cancer and the racism she faced in health care, and Stella replied, “That’s how I was feeling for you ... you felt helpless, like you wanted to help her but it was in there, (pointing at her heart and then mine) that’s why I went to get you.” I asked her how she knew and she said, “It’s from the spirits.”

For me, the meeting of Elder Stella Blackbird spidered into a parkland filled with birches and spruce, mosses and prairie grasses, roses and brambles, yarrow and rat root, and much like the Métis sash I honour, it provided a weaving of realizations and opportunities to move to those who are related. A few years later, I was teaching a course at NORTEP when Jim Searson, one of my students, showed me the beauty of his wife by sharing a video of his daughter, Aileen Searson, singing *O Canada* in Cree, and being quietly supported by her mother, a Cree linguist and the Chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band. Tammy Cook-Searson and Stella Blackbird hold places within the esteemed kinships of chiefs. Although they have more than thirty life years separating them, they have similar and yet very different stories. Both of these women originate from *Treaty 6* Territory in Saskatchewan and were born to families of the land. The vast beauty of this territory is found in the lakes, rivers and streams of the southern boreal forest and the parkland near Stella Blackbird's childhood home.

Tammy Cook-Searson, the current chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, was born on her family's trap line at Brabant Lake, Saskatchewan. As her family moved, they lived in a canvas tent in the summer and a trap line cabin in the winter. Changes in schools became the norm and she attended primary and middle school in three communities within her current jurisdiction. The buffered middle years of elementary school were roughed out by the negativity of the Prince Albert Indian Residential School that she attended at age 7. It was here she learned to speak English. In Grade 10 she dropped out of school but returned soon after, recognizing her partying days were numbered. She joined Alcoholics Anonymous at the age of 16 and returned to Churchill High School, a mainstream high school in the community of La Ronge, and received her

high school diploma three years later. It was shortly after this, she experienced a trauma so great, one from which many parents never recover; as a young married woman she lost her first child Alexander in a drowning accident. During her recovery from this loss, Cook-Searson did not return to drinking but rather dove into social services, taking classes and working with the Lac La Ronge Indian Band supporting children and families in need. She recognizes this time in her life as one of coming to a realization of her own hurt, a facing up to the fact she, too, was an abused child. She has lived on reserve since her teens, and in my observations, I believe she holds the same experiences and knowledges as many older traditional peoples. Indeed, she knows the ancient Cree language distinctly, as well, some might say, as she knows the boreal forests and fresh water rivers and lakes where she hunts, traps and fishes. Tammy Cook-Searson, now in her early forties, has a lived experience of being semi-nomadic, she is a residential school survivor, and today she lives within the constraints of the Government of Canada and the *Indian Act* as she works to help her peoples.

In 2005, she became the first woman to become Chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, following eight committed years as a councilor for this Cree nation. As a political force, she follows in her distant uncle's footsteps as a strong vibrant leader who carries his tradition of preserving culture while bridging the necessity of bringing economic vitality to today's kinship. With a great love for her people, she visits the 10,000 plus members within the six reserve communities of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, one of the largest First Nations in Canada, as much as she can and by doing so, she is visible with her traditional commitment. It has been said Cook-Searson attends first to those who need her comfort and this is evident by her travels to visit the Elders, youth

and families within the reserve communities of La Ronge, Grandmother's Bay, Hall Lake, Little Red River, Stanley Mission, and Sucker River. She is the first to acknowledge that she is but one of many that work with her to advance wellness for the communities and families. Together they strive to meet existing challenges, and although she recognizes the many successes that have transpired in services related to education, social services and health, she draws attention to the advice of the Elders:

Elders have expressed to me that they want to see movement on our Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE). A new focus of energy must concentrate on a different strategy to bring resolution to the number one outstanding issue of our Lac La Ronge Indian Band. We must begin to develop a plan for the future, on how we can best administer the TLE once it is finalized (Cook-Searson, March 27, 2008, La Ronge Northerner).

Although she recognizes her role as a chief and leader with a membership in and an expressed commitment to the Prince Albert Grand Council (PAGC), the First Nations of Saskatchewan (FSIN) and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), she has told me her priorities are at home, on her homelands, and with her peoples. As Chair of the Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership, of which the band has many holdings in a diverse portfolio, she manages an onerous work schedule as she meets with many other nations, Saskatchewan and Canadian peoples, and those in industry. She manages to deliver more than three hundred speeches a year on behalf of the band and council, but this work does not preclude her numerous council meetings, and private and public initiations. All this while carrying out the functions of mother, grandmother, daughter, sister and partner.

When Cook-Searson speaks of her leadership, she does so from a Woodlands Cree worldview, one set in her heart by her parents:

I never really thought about being a leader in my community. It is just something that happened ... it didn't matter who it was, like somebody would be broken down on the road and we would always stop and help them out. Sometimes we would give them our own spare tire, because that's just the kind of people my parents are. So people would always say to my mom [run for office] and I thought that leadership was just about helping people and I guess in a way it is.

That what it is. It's about helping people and about giving voice to people ...

Although she is a veteran marathoner and a political leader, Cook-Searson knows she is not so different than those she serves. *When the Other is Me* (LaRocque, 2010) defines this woman. In Cook-Searson's daily life she knows Indigenous leaders face the same problems that beset all women. Currently, in the midst of an intense campaign, she seeks her fourth term of office with the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, one of the largest of the Cree First Nations in Canada, and by being *a woman of, for and with the people* there is no doubt in my mind she will succeed. As Cook-Searson nails down the components of endurance, she follows a critical Woodlands Cree mantra for her life work:

Wecatoskemitotan mena setoskatotan. Let's work together and support each other.

Elder Stella Blackbird grew up at Beardy's & Okemasis Willow Cree First Nation in the vast parkland near Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. Unlike Cook-Searson, she was forced into the residential school experience at the young age of five and spent a span of ten years at St. Michael's Indian Residential School in Duck Lake. Influenced by the traumatic years in this school, her many life-works have focused on the healing necessary

for residential school survivors and their kinships. At age 15, with a wounded psyche and soul, she left school and Saskatchewan to live with her sister at Keeseekoowenin Ojibway First Nation in Manitoba, Canada. It was here she was able to find peace: “ I have spent about 60 years at Keeseekoowenin, after the residential school at Duck Lake from Beardy’s.”

Blackbird’s grandfather, Walter Little Pine, carries the honour of being the second chief of Beardy’s under the signatory of *Treaty 6*. His tenure followed Kamayistowesit (Chief Beardy) after his death in 1889. Little Pine was a visionary, a strong man, and as Elder Stella Blackbird does today, he did his best to protect his peoples, however, it seems it may not have been enough to protect the spirit needs of his kinship at that time. Stella also holds her maternal grandfather, her mother’s father, Jimmy Seeseequasis, in great esteem, as she does her grandmothers, and mother and father:

I remember my grandpa; I learned a lot from him. His name was Jimmy Seeseequasis, but my grandma had passed away, my mother’s mother. And my other grandparents, my grandfather died when I was born, I never knew him. But he was the second chief in Beardy’s after Chief Beardy’, my grandfather was the chief. My grandmother, Sophie, I remember her. Oh she used to do lots of beautiful beadwork; that’s how she made her living and sometimes I would go with her when she would go and sell her jackets, whatever she made, mukluks, mitts to Prince Albert. I was very sad when they passed; that’s why I use the black beads. My mother’s name was Gladys and my dad, there was lots of love, my dad’s name was Paul.

As she showed me her lineage and life relevance with her talking stick, a living example that she uses to help children and adults learn about their own histories and Indigenous culture, I envisioned the love she has for her kinship and how that has transferred into the love she has for all young people and families of today. In retrospect, it seems it was the connection with her grandparents and their ties to traditional land and the living that took place on the land that keeps Stella's vision clear and focused:

I put this for my grandmother, the bell and the angel because she was a very devout Catholic, but she practiced in medicines too. I couldn't remember that but as I was healing I started remembering what she did. She used to gather herbs and we used to help her. She worked very hard; she used to look after her horses and the cows she had. And I put this black dress and beads; she always had beads similar like this and she always wore a dark black dress, a long dress. I just loved her and was very sad when she passed away.

In light of her own experiences, Stella Blackbird believes governmental colonization and Christian indoctrination, and the consequent demise of her peoples through residential school trauma, has imprinted a deep wound upon her nation. She recognizes the scar of colonization as an infused normality within Canadian culture and she is deeply concerned about this bleeding of Indigenous positionality, which makes it difficult for many of her people to reach for self-actualization and self-determination.

When I came out of residential school, I was very confused and sad; sad that so many things happened in residential school. There was abuse, all kinds of abuse. I was so scared to do something wrong all the time.

In a similar way, Chief Tammy Cook-Searson experienced a slice of residential school trauma and she muses over the comparative history of Black Americans and North American Indigenous peoples:

The same things with residential school ... keep their strength but rule their mind, make them feel like they are so weak in the mind, then that way they are obedient to you. That's why people have to become educated and learn the systems...

Both Chief Cook- Searson and Elder Stella Blackbird work tirelessly to help women and youth, but it may be their groundbreaking work with political and community organizations that is most commendable, because perhaps, it is this that has the greatest impact on life wellness of children and women. These resilient, strongly grounded Cree women are *woman as land*.

Women of *Yak'enáges*

Yak'enáges is the Denesuline word for northern lights and I chose it to describe the women of Dene ancestry that agreed to participate in this research. Elder Marie Adam of Fort MacMurray, Alberta, and Ila Bussidor, the first woman Chief of the Sayisi Dene First Nation, Tadoule Lake, Manitoba, are women born of the land. They have a proud ancestral history of leadership and they have become women “who work as two people” (Mackenzie, 1972). The traditional lands of these Denesuline women are located in northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba, in what some might refer to as the “barrens”, a land so harsh and cold and so far north that with a stone's throw, you are entering the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Here, within the Territory of *Treaty 8* near the community of Fond du Lac, Saskatchewan, Marie Adam was born and raised upon her family trap line. Similarly, Ila Bussidor, born in the army hospital in Churchill,

Manitoba, spent time on the land in North River, near the Dene homeland of Duck Lake, Manitoba and within the boundaries of *Treaty 5* Territory. As a child, she lived here for a short time with her family until the relocation to Churchill occurred. She recalls living the nightmare of those housed in what has become known as *Dene Village*, and although there is much pain in this memory, she has the courage to relay this story. She believes this living memory shows relevance to the impact Indigenous children experience from relocation and hurt; she shared one recurring memory of when she was about six years of age and how she recalls having to walk a long cold road to an unwelcoming school in Churchill.

The Dene lands are known as the *dechinule* or the "land of little sticks", that place north where many of us have never been, a land of harsh climate, clean air, with sparkling snows and a tree line that makes its way between the taiga and the tundra while searching for the truth. I have learned that *Tu* (water) is the lifeblood of the Dene, and Ila and Marie, like their ancestors before them, those who lived as one with the *Idthen* (caribou), are strong, resilient, resourceful and long living, just as the waters that sustain them. As they work to preserve their lands and protect their peoples, they have endured more than one lifetime of hurt, abuse and even genocide. Both are storytellers and negotiators, and although they were born in different times, and have different histories of how *woman is land*, these women recognize the feminine as a necessary entity and equal partner to the masculine, for the survival and sustainability of their Denesuline kinships. Each in her own way has acted quickly, sometimes fiercely, often with agility and peaceful movement, as do the Aurora Borealis, coming out brightly when most needed, when days were dark and kinships were dismantled and distraught. Each shines

brightly, but when one is not prepared or alert, or one has not learned, she doesn't always see what these women are doing or how their actions have had a lasting effect on those who are authentic witnesses. Like the *Yak'enáges*, they appear when most needed, when change is occurring, and when the right moment for transformation is near. In honouring these women "who work as two people", I share their words with respect and reverence.

Four years ago I was blessed to attend the *Keepers of the Water IV* Gathering held on the traditional grounds of the Hatchet Lake Denesuline First Nation, on the shores of beautiful Wollaston Lake in northern Saskatchewan. It was here I first met Elder Marie Adam when she presented at the Elders' Forum in the company of 22 other Elders; she was one of only two women. Over the course of five days, this gathering brought together chiefs and elders, families with youth, journalists and poets and film-makers, environmentalists and scientists, educators and activists, grandmothers and grandchildren, paddlers and even card-playing gamblers, and it was the highlight of my summer in 2010. Most importantly, it brought together hundreds of strong, proud and energized peoples of the Dene Nation. These peoples make up Dene tribal groups across the north of Canada, among whom are those concerned about the protection of the Athabasca watershed. Included in those 500 plus attendees were Indigenous peoples from British Columbia, the Northwest Territories, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Nunavut, Manitoba and Ontario. The privilege of hearing Cree, Inuit, Métis and many Dene Elders was a gift that is rare. It was beautiful to hear the Elders speaking in their traditional languages about the need for health to return to their lands, and for the protection of the water, especially that of the Athabasca River and its watershed. When the Elders say, "Water is my life blood," you sit up and pay attention. In this forum, Elder Marie Adam,

was one of the last Elders to speak and she spoke with emotion and elegance, like no other Elder I had ever heard. She said many things, however the beauty of her being resonated with me, and her position on protecting the youth, the water, the land and the women still resonates. It was her who first said, “It is the women who will be the ones to make change, it is the women and the children we must be giving our attention to,” (Adam, 2010).

Globally, Indigenous peoples share her recognition of water as a sacred entity and she explains: “Right from the time you’re conceived, [you’re] in water, then you’re floating in water for the next nine months. That’s why we say that water is so sacred, because it is life,” (Paley, 2012, para 45). When Marie Adam was just a child, her father taught her about reverence and respect for the land and the water. Each time they went out by boat, he would remind her of the tobacco offering required by Lake Athabasca: “My father used to say... don’t ever think you are greater than the lake itself, than the water, because you never know what can happen,” she said. “Our people never messed around with water, we had a lot of respect for water” (Paley, 2012, para 46). Marie Adam believes the protection of this sacred entity needs all members of a community; she and the other Elders at the *Keepers* Elders Forum ask that we heed their voices and put aside our differences as they “call upon and empower our young people to embrace traditional knowledge and take action that guides us in a new direction” (*Keepers of the Water*, Elders Resolution, 2010).

A survivor of residential school and a broken marriage, Marie Adam left Ontario in the early 70’s with her five children to return to her father’s home for the summer, in Uranium City, Saskatchewan, prior to moving to Fort McMurray. This return to

Saskatchewan reminded her of her family's move in the early 1950's from Fond de Lac to Uranium City when Eldorado Mines displaced her father and his livelihood:

My father had a trap line just around where Eldorado Mining was, and that's where Eldorado Mines, they just pushed him out of his trap line. And then he had to work at odd jobs, he trapped here and there and we were living in Goldfield that time and all of a sudden Uranium City started. In 1952 we moved to Uranium City, and then we lived in a tent for a while, until my father built a log house down by the lake. That's where we stayed. Most of our First Nations people lived down by the lake. It was so peaceful at the time; and that's when life, our life start changing. I was born in 38, so 52; I was 14 [years of age].

After much discussion and with movement between Fond de Lac, Uranium City and Edmonton, Marie and her children decided to relocate to Fort McMurray where she still lives. All her children live in Alberta, and four work for oil and gas developments. Her youngest child, Kuni, is an environmentalist and a scientist, and in some ways follows in her mother's footsteps. Marie Adam has many friends and contacts through out the Dene nation and beyond. Another group of her closest friends are those who are members of the Blood Tribe Nation in southern Alberta. She speaks with joy about how they helped her body, mind and spirit heal and she returned to Aboriginal spirituality. Like Elder Stella Blackbird and others who have attend residential schools and experienced colonialism through state, church and police, she speaks with sadness of her own history,

The Catholic Church overruled the whole village, everyone. Anything you did was wrong; it was a sin. That's how they treated us; that's how we lost our traditional culture.

but recognizes that one can heal and move to traditional knowledge and spirituality in the way she did. She is a woman of exceptional depth, knowledge and grace. Her love shines through in all that she currently does, and I am certain it came from the grounding she received as a child:

I grew up in Fond du Lac, that's where I was born, Fond du Lac, Saskatchewan. I grew up very traditionally, on a trap line. Then we lived in a village. I came from a large family and there was, my mother had 15 of us. My father and my brothers trapped and we lived off the land all summer. We'd travel, camp around. It was so great, like that. When I think back now, I have a lot of time on my hands. I remember so well. We would go camping and my dad or brothers would put a net in the lake or river, wherever we were. Most of the time we were on the lake and we'd set a net and by the time we'd get to the shore, sometimes we would camp there, some time we would just eat there and leave (...), most of the time. And I remember so well, my dad would get the willows and he would take all the leaves off the willows and then he would make a grill, a grill out of the willows. [He would] use them and he would put all these leaves down on the ground. By that time they would go back and check the net and we would have fresh fish. And then we ate on the leaves. Now that environment was so clean. Up there, it was great, you know for us kids. And that's where, when the caribou were our main source of diet too, plus we had fish and beaver. And the caribou, my mother would always love it; we were never short of it. In the springtime, this is a caribou story. Anyways, in the springtime there would be about 5 families go out. In that time known as in the springtime and that's when they would make enough

dry meat to last us all summer. And they would tan all the hides. And as a kid I remember, I used to hear the sea gulls. I would just love to hear the sea gulls, they were always around. I just loved to hear the sea gulls. And so, I remember seeing my mother and my grandmother take the bones from the caribou, and they would take all of them and pound the bones and they would boil the fat out of it and make grease. There would be dry meat, some smoked and cured. And sometimes she would boil those, and it was almost like eating fresh meat. So actually there was nothing wasted from the caribou. And the dogs would have whatever they needed. Dogs were always well looked after.

When Marie thinks back, she feels the peace she had as a child. Her work with Elders gives her a space to express her concern about the lack of access young people have in gaining traditional knowledge. Today Marie sits on the Elders Council of *Treaty 8*. She is one of more than 60 Elders from 23 First Nations; however, she is only one of the two women who grace this council. This concerns her. She thinks about the residential school fallout and what it means for her and other Indigenous peoples. As Marie says:

I learned a lot too from our *Treaty 8* Gatherings, from hearing other Elders, from what they had gone through, and when I think about what I had gone through, it was so terrible, until I hear someone else's story.

Her focus today is on the protection of women and children, land and water, as she infuses the two entities as one - *woman as land; children as water*:

I'm reading a lot for protecting [women] because I feel we don't deserve the abuse, because I said we are the caregivers, and we look after everything and we make sure that things are taken care of. I don't like it when our First Nations

women have been so abused, like murder and missing ... that really hurts me [and] my feelings because I've been abused. I don't like it when I see women with a shiner. It doesn't have to be First Nations' women. Or children being abused. Did you know there are 64,000 of our First Nations children in care?

When I think of the children Marie speaks of, I think about the thousands of children in care she worries for, I think of those children who did not survive residential school, and I think of Ila Bussidor and the travesty of the children who died in *Dene Village*. I had the privilege of meeting Ila in January (2013), however, I knew of her and her work some years before. This woman and all of who she is, daughter, mother, grandmother, a woman who feels the grief of her people like no other I had met, was gracious enough to agree to be part of what I was doing and it moved me, emotionally and spiritually. As the first woman chief of her nation, I imagined she had the qualities of a strong leader, and those qualities were brought home during that first meeting, but my relationality to her came from reading *Night Spirits: The Story of Relocation of the Sayisi Dene* (Bussidor's & Bilgen-Reinart, 2000). It was then my heart began connecting to Ila Bussidor and the peoples of the east. This story moved my heart and soul.

Although more than 50 years have passed since that autumn day when the cold of a dust storm greeted the Dene on their descent from a Cessna plane into the town of Churchill, Manitoba, the pain of her people is real, it is current and it reverberates. This is a story of dispossession, deception, demise, and desolation, and it's more than a blemish of dark colonialism; it is a Canadian holocaust. Years ago at the beginning of this journey, I read Bussidor's and Bilgen-Reinart book (2000), and I cried for days, perhaps weeks, for the hurt she and her peoples had experienced. I did not understand how I had been amiss,

how I had not familiarized myself with this Canadian genocide long before this. I thought of my own ancestors and what those years meant for them, and I wondered how many Canadians know nothing of the Sayisi Dene—how more than a third of their nation perished in the shanty town of *Dene Village*, three kilometers from Churchill, Manitoba. When I share what might be one of the darkest realities of Manitoban and Canadian history, I am still brought to tears, but within all of that sadness, is a glimmer of hope, a sliver of light, as I re-story the resistance of Ila Bussidor.

The life story of Ila Bussidor is one of hurt and resilience. It is a journey of searching, praying, knowing, speaking, waiting and acting. It's about picking oneself up when there is nothing left to pick up, and it is about moving on to find hope and love. For Bussidor, it is the identity of being a Dene, a Denesuline woman that gives her strength; this and the knowledge that she is one of those responsible to teach the youth of her kinship:

I like to say I'm a Dene, ok, I'm proud. I'm grateful that I've made it this far. To me, if I ask a young person, "Why do you say you're proud to be Dene?" They don't know the history or they don't have the time to look at it or whatever, they're young. The Dene have always been connected to the land; that's our identity as a people and without our land, we're broken. And that is what happened to my people when they were uprooted off the land, traditional territory, and thrown into a town.

Ila Bussidor was a very young woman when she became Chief of the Sayisi Dene, and like her father before her, she understands the need to build up her people and return to tradition. She internalizes the love of her great father Artie Cheekie, and as she reflects

upon that, she is driven to ensure the youth of her kinship know their history, and the sustainability and independence that existed before relocation and dispossession. She gifts this story about her father:

I think there are so many hurtful things that happened when I was young. You know the youth. I believe that from the time I was born ... my parents were not involved in alcohol yet. I was the second youngest of ten children. The love, the nurturing, everything, the protection I got from my parents. I think that's what saved me. If it wasn't for that, I probably would be in the gutter somewhere.

I remember my dad coming into the house. We lived in a log cabin in North River. That's about 40 miles inland from the Hudson Bay. And my sister Sarah said, "My mom used to say, your dad is coming". She could hear my dad coming, but it would take like a long time for him to open the door. So I asked her, "How did you know that my dad was coming when he didn't come in right away"? It was the bells from the harness of the sled from the dog team. And the dog teams that they had back then, the harnesses were decorated with bells and ribbons and even the sled, their toboggans. I guess the jingling from those, that's what she knew.

For Bussidor, these joyful memories are clouded by the experience of Dene Village and the ongoing land claims issue. She also shared a story about her mother as provider and protector, when on many occasions her father was away hunting:

That was her leadership role, in bringing up the children and making sure we were taught the right things, like how to love instead of fight. And my mom did the hunting, she would put the net in the lake in the wintertime, and we would all be there watching her pull out the net, take the fish out. When my dad was away my

mom would do the hunting, go out and shoot the ptarmigans, the fish or if she had to shoot a caribou, she also did that too. In the old way, I guess they say the women would be the ones who are leaders, the ones that carrying all the gear, when they are moving camp. My mom had to work to make the caribou hides, tan the hides to do the sewing for our clothing and that. I know how to do a caribou hide, tan a caribou hide. I did it because I can say, “oh, I did it.”

For Bussidor and Adam, it is the lived experience of breathing and being one and the same as their Dene lands and waters, and it is the infusion of Denesuline tradition, language and ceremony that surrounds their resistances and their visions. These women of ancient knowledges believe their ancestry keeps them strong, vital and long living. Both are *woman as land*.

Women of *Sila*

Some time ago I began to explore the Inuit root word *Sila* and from that pedagogical exploration I realized Joan Scottie and Jennifer Watkins fit this persona. Although *Sila* has been given attention by scholars, scientists and even playwrights, the context of the word presents variations within the knowings of those attached to it; it is as dependent upon the land context as it is on the human interpretation of its meaning. Although *Sila* cannot be explained in a simple way, I advance this word for understanding the personas of Scottie and Watkins as it is infused within the vast complexities of these women, and the lands they gain life from. *Sila* is not a personification of human beings, but the other way around: “the person is owned by sila we are the personification of sila” (Leduc, 2010, p. 243). Wisdom keeper Jaypeetee expands on the root of *Sila* to share that *Silatuniq* refers to the wisdom for practical land

living which in turn influences a spirit driven conscious human action. Tim Leduc (2010) further conceptualizes *Sila* as an Arctic phenomenon; one, which demands those studying her and her landforms and peoples, engage in a way that is ethical and spiritual. In Leduc's seminal work, *Climate, Culture, Change: Inuit and Western Dialogues with a Warming North (2010)*, he cites shaman Najagneq and his sharing of story with the Nordic anthropologist, Knud Rasmussen in 1924. Although *Sila* is sometimes contextualized in the male form, I argue, the traits of wisdom and reason, those that Scottie and Watkins infuse while advancing the environment as a living breathing entity, make this conceptualization non-gendered or perhaps even feminine:

Sila [is] a strong spirit, the upholder of the universe, of the weather, in fact all life on Earth – so mighty that his speech to man comes not through ordinary words, but through storms, snowfall, rain showers, the sea, through all the forces that man fears, or through sunshine, calm seas or small, innocent children. (Leduc, 2010, prologue)

There are no ordinary words for what these women have done, seen or experienced, either through blood memory or their life works. I believe it is the spirit of *Sila* that guides them. These women have worked their magic into speeches and actions, with so much vision, clarity and impact that the ceremony they engage in resounds throughout our lands and beyond.

In 2009, I began to follow the activist work of Joan Scottie as I read about the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq caribou herds, the disturbances to their ranges, and in particular, the calving grounds northwest of Baker Lake and the Thelon River. What I found was an activist like no other, an Inuit Caribou grandmother who converses in

English and in Inuktitut, a survivor of displacement and residential school experiences, a woman of policies, paper and oral tradition, and an Inuit elder with a contemporary western consciousness. An Inuk who perhaps understands more about traditional ecological knowledge than many Aboriginal peoples and most Canadians; a spirit who is indeed, *woman as land*.

Although Joan Scottie has lived in Baker Lake, Nunavut's only inland community, for most of her life, it is the land outside the community that defines who she is. *Qamani'tuaq* (Inuktitut for where the river widens) or Baker Lake is her home today. The large lake the community is named after flanks this settlement situated at the mouth of the Thelon River. Fertile tundra wetlands surround the Thelon and Kazan riverbeds, and the richness of *Qamani'tuaq* shows itself in an abundance of plant and wildlife species; caribou, muskoxen, rabbits, wolverines, foxes, wolves and fish live within the lands and waters of the inland Inuit. Scottie thrives on the tundra and in this land of extreme cold, biting winds and blizzardy days, she supports hunters and children, mothers and Elders. Her quest to protect her homelands started in the late 70's and with that first step towards activism, she has never looked back. As she told me about her life, I recognized the impact her semi-nomadic family had on who it is she is today:

I was born at *Uqpilik* (place of willows) at the north, beginning *Qamanirjuaq* Lake. My first years were spent at *Qurnguryuaq* (narrows) a hunting camp south of Baker Lake where my family lived for several years before I was born. Later, we moved further south a ways, to Ferguson Lake, where I grew up. I didn't come to a community until I was twelve years old. I grew up pretty much out in the wilderness.

We were very much a caribou people, following the movements of the caribou, hunting with the seasons. When I was around three years old, we moved to Ferguson Lake, an old Inuit ancient caribou hunting ground. This is where thousands of caribou migrate through certain times of the year. My father had four wives, so our family's camps were big. During the springtime, when the caribou were migrating, we would move to a smaller seasonal camp to dry meat. In the fall we would set up another camp collecting *urquksat*, caribou skins suitable for clothing and caching. This would be our additional winter camp, a place, in Inuktitut it is called *Kangiq* and *ukyuaq*. It was like a big family to us; we all supported each other and it was a teamwork. My mother had two older brothers, and I had a young sister and two older brothers. They also had their dogs too, they provided by hunting and [eventually] I had three younger sisters, four younger brothers. So we were living out in the land until we moved to Baker Lake. It was at Ferguson Lake, a hundred and twenty miles southwest of Baker Lake and south of Baker Lake. My father's name was Basil; Basil Scottie. Since the Inuit couldn't say Scottie, they used to call him Hitaki; that's the name I go by on my Facebook.

Like some of the other Elders in this research, Joan Scottie has experienced the trauma of dislocation, residential school and other struggles. Here she speaks about the enforced move from Ferguson Lake when she was a young girl:

I finally moved to Baker Lake in the early '60's. A government patrol plane came to Ferguson Lake in November and my mother had a bad backache and couldn't get up or walk. The nurse from the patrol plane said she has to go to Baker Lake.

We, three children by her, went with her for some medical attention. Me and my younger sister and brother went with her. Once there, the government grabbed us and told us we had to go to school. I was around eleven or twelve years old. We couldn't get back home to Ferguson Lake so we had to settle here.

The following April, my mother was diagnosed with TB and was sent to sanatorium in Manitoba for three years. We (the children) were placed in seasonal hostels (residential style homes), where Inuit children were placed while their parents still lived out in their hunting camps. After my mother left us, I only attended school for a little while because the principal offered me a job making hot cocoa in the morning and three hot lunches a week. He told me I would make seventy-five dollars a month, so I took the job. I was around thirteen or fourteen years old and was pretty much on my own, looking after my younger sister and brother. My mother was away in a sanitarium and my father still lived out on the land, only coming in three times a year to trade, so I didn't have any guardian to tell me that it would be best if I stayed in school instead. If my English isn't great today, I don't blame myself; it's because I didn't spend a lot of time in a classroom. I cried so much during that time. Almost every day I went to the settlement administrator, who worked for the federal government, and said, "I want to go back! I want to go back to Ferguson Lake!" Of course, I was underage, and they didn't listen to me. I think that must have been the lowest time of my life.

When my mother came back about three years later, I felt I was all grown up. A government charter plane used to go back and forth between Baker Lake

and Churchill, and one day I just got on the plane. I must have been pretty strong-minded! My mother had always told me that I was, even as a small child. In fact, during the times when there was starvation in our camp and when a normal child would have been depressed and lacking energy, my mother said I was always optimistic. I must have gotten that from my father. Although that strong-mindedness was always there, it got stronger as I struggled with life.

When I got on that plane, I wanted to go to Churchill and look for a job. I was sixteen years old and had no idea what I was going to do there. I worked as a babysitter for a few months, then in September I attended residential school, the Churchill Vocational Centre that had just started up a year or so earlier. I stayed with a family for the first year. There were two hundred students there from all the Inuit communities from Kivalliq and Northern Quebec and Baffin regions. That was a hard time for me, because I had only had a little bit of schooling, probably a Grade 3 level or less, but I caught up with the others. I also had a hard time with restrictions like going to bed at 8:30. I got most of my education there, though, and I supposed the experience was good for us; it's where I really learned how the world is supposed to operate.

Today Joan Scottie spends profuse amounts of time in her office and in meetings. She works long hours writing, reviewing, and editing reports and other campaigns, while collaborating with scientists, young scholars and reporters. Her attention to detail, to writing and speaking, and to collecting the data necessary to preserve her homelands was influenced by her love of learning:

I left Churchill to return to Baker Lake in 1968. My mother was there, but my father was still living out on the land, because he didn't like community life. By then, my sister and brother were attending school in Churchill. I found a job with the federal government, at the Baker Lake community administration office. In the early 70s, I went back to school and took some adult education classes. Even though as a child I started school late, I loved reading and learning and wanted to further my education. A lot of what I had learned was self-taught. I was in my early twenties, and although I had a good job working in the settlement office distributing welfare and being a translator, I knew something was missing. Later I went to college in Brandon, Manitoba and in the early eighties, went back to school yet again in Fort Smith. I wanted to understand how society works; I wanted to learn and understand the rest of Canada and the world.

The Joan Scottie of today is known throughout the world by anti-nuclear activists, Indigenous peoples, academics, environmental scientists and the bureaucrats running uranium companies. She is a tenacious and energized woman that finds refuge upon her traditional lands and in those she serves. In a similar resilience, yet in a different stance from that of Joan Scottie's, Jennifer Watkins is a force to be reckoned with and she too is a woman who seeks to understand.

In searching for eight participants to take part in this research, I thought about inviting a woman of youth, someone who had the pulse of what Aboriginal youth need and want in her back pocket, someone who embodied a spirit of an Elder, a woman who was younger, contemporary, and yet still informed by tradition. Not an easy find, but through a search of youth Inuit leaders, I was lead to the *National Inuit Youth Council*

and Jennifer Watkins. In reading about her work and life, I was greatly impressed by this young Inuit woman's concern for the youth of her nation:

“The Inuit suicide rate is eleven times the rate of the rest of Canada which is unacceptable. As it is mainly Inuit youth who die by suicide the impact on Inuit Nunangat is considerable. This loss of future leaders must stop,” said Jennifer Watkins, President of the National Inuit Youth Council. “NIYC is committed to helping Inuit youth to celebrate life and to overcome challenges which may seem overwhelming at first glance, by talking, sharing and promoting resilience. We all have a role to play in combating and ending this appalling statistic by encouraging all Inuit Nunangat to embrace life.” (Watkins in Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2011, para 2).

Unlike the other women in this research, Watkins is young, only 30 years of age, however, she has a lifetime of experiences, both hers and her ancestors, to share with those who will listen. She lives and works in Kuujjuaq, Quebec, or Nunavik, home to 2500 Inuk, a place where her family has lived for generations. This northern community lies on the western shore of the Koksoak River, about 50 kilometers upstream from Ungava Bay. Although it is situated very close to the tundra, it is surrounded by the boreal forest of black spruce and larch. Those living here in Kuujjuaq rely heavily on Artic char, Atlantic salmon, trout and other sea life, as well as the caribou for their sustenance. Annually, the George River Caribou herd migrates through this region during the months of August and September.

Watkins has made her home here. She has lived here for most of her life, with the exception of when she was a student at McGill University in Montreal. She is fluent in

the languages of Inuktitut, English and French and she believes it is this gift that helps her set direction for those supporting Inuit health services. As the past president of the National Inuit Youth Council, she has worked with young Inuit across the country for many years. In her current position as Director of Inuit Values and Practices for the Nunavik Regional Board of Health and Social Services she leads others to avenues of wellness, through personal experiences and political maneuvering. For a woman so young, she is worldly and wise, as she understands the importance of the land and the need for the young to embrace their ancestral positionality. The impact of her childhood resonates in her words:

I grew up here in Kuujuaq, with an Inuit mother and a *qallunaat*, which is a white father. I have two brothers and one sister. My father was a very good man, he was for Inuit people and he always fought for Inuit people. And I remember him, when I was about six or seven years old, he must have been always stressing the importance of fighting for Inuit rights since I was a little girl. This topic would come up at the table when we were eating. Sometimes he would drop me off to school and pick me up from school. He would always stress the importance of other Inuit women who were successful in our region and I recall him saying, “I want you, I want my girl to be very respectful to people and the way you gain respect, if you respect them, they will respect you back, ” and he always mentioned Mary Simon and Shelia Watt Cloutier and I had no idea who they were. All of all these people’s names when I was a little girl, and that’s how he brought us up. That’s how it started, I remember ...

As an Indigenous woman who is trilingual, she told me how she easily transfers her skills to the needs of those in Quebec and to her work within the government of Canada's bureaucracy. She stresses the importance of using her mother tongue, how she prefers to use Inuktitut when she is working with young people and why it critical for the Inuit youth of today to understand, use and rejoice in their ancestral language. She embraces that positionality today as she shared how she learned versatility and leadership skills as a child in a French immersion school:

And we would have a period in the day when we would take Inuktitut classes for an hour and a half in a day. I'd like to inform you that Inuktitut was always my mother tongue; we spoke it at home.

Her identity as a leader was prevalent to many other Inuit leaders and at 27 she became President of the National Inuit Youth Council, as she moved to gather and unify knowledges to address the high rates of suicide among Inuit youth:

"Jennifer brings exceptional experience to this role," said Mary Simon, president of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, in an Aug. 16 news release from ITK. "She is a proven leader in her region and I know that her talent for building unity will serve her well in this national role." (NUNATSIAQ Online, 2010, para 2).

Although today she has broadened her role in Inuit health services to support residential school survivors, most recently at the Truth and Reconciliations gathering in Montreal, and others in her region, she remains committed to the needs of Inuit youth. As she explains, there is nothing more critical than a healthy identity:

I must help others to remain focused on our identity as Inuit. To stay strong, stand proud of identity and keep our traditions alive through our ways of life. Our language, our land and culture must be in the forefront of our young people.

The protection and advancement of Indigenous identity the Inuit, Cree, Dene, and Métis women speak of in this research is a collective understanding, and one of the significant themes within this work. Watkins and Scottie embrace their Indigeneity in the examples of land living and in their cultural adherence to language and tradition. Every one of the *Sisters* has collectively advanced and supported her Indigeneity in the protection of her homelands. Attention to and preservation of ceremony, oral language and ancestral teachings seems foremost in their positionalities. When I listened to their stories my emotions swirl. I was almost like I became one of these women as I learned to hear each through place and time. It is not only their words, it seems it is the spirit found in the spaces they provide, it is in their quiet positionalities, and in the waiting for a sign within those spaces that resounds in my embodiment. With those who honour the throat singers of the Inuit, the Dene drummers of the north, the Métis fiddlers of Batoche and the Cree dancers of the woodlands, I sing, drum, dance and fiddle as I celebrate the stories of these women. Like Cherokee Betty Bell (1994), I believe these stories are forever in my blood. They will be kept, but they must be heard:

I listened, their stories settling forever in my blood, and I knew the stories were told and told not for carrying but for keeping. They heard, and they taught me to hear, the truth in things not said. They listened, and they taught me to listen in the space between words (p. 56-57).

Chapter V - Re-storying A Landscape of Justice

*In Aboriginal thought,
the Spirit enters this earth walk with a purpose for being here
and with specific gifts for fulfilling that purpose.
It has a hunger and a thirst for learning*

Marie Battiste

Swimming Upstream – Recognition and Resistance

For these women of *Sisters*, swimming upstream is a life trip that at times is as harsh and cold as the waters of their lands, and as they proceed through these waters which are at varying times, shallow and deep, fast and unpredictable, swirling and soothing, it takes vision, endurance, stability and persistence to keep afloat. In this northern land known as Canada, the resistances of these women could be compared to the journey of the *Iqaluk* (Inuktitut word for Artic char). Within the sacredness of Inuit stories, one is taught the *Iqaluk* is “the one that jumps” and “the one who swims upstream” (Anirmiliit, nd). Like the *Iqaluk*, the spring of their lives signifies their descent or run to the ocean, while the upstream run, in the late summer of their lives, shows the fight they have as they attempt to return to their home waters. The *Iqaluk* defines the agility and the flow of these women and metaphorically shows how “one who jumps” has the ability to maneuver in both freshwater streams and salty swells. These are women who by the very nature of swimming upstream are strong women who project longevity, versatility and adaptability. The resistances they have put forth to protect their lands, waters and kinships are no different than those of the *Iqaluk* as they make way through the seasons of their lives.

When I began this investigation of how Indigenous women of Canada are addressing environmental racism, I first asked what they knew of the construct and whether they had heard of the term. Six of the eight women had not heard it before their engagement in this research and this is likely why. It is a term coined by Reverend Dr. Ben Chavis and advanced by the critical environmentalist Robert Bullard, and the southern discourse stemming from these works has not really made its way past euro-centric ecology into Indigenous Canada. Although discourses around environmental racism are becoming more common within American Indian resistance studies, and it has received recent noted attention through the work of activists within the *Idle No More* movement, it is not a term widely used here in Canada. Until recently, many scholars and common folk had not heard the term. Interestingly, although many of the women had never used the term prior to this research, as Indigenous peoples, they instinctively knew what it meant and how this phenomenon impacted their lands and kinships. Rose Richardson explains:

We, as native people, have been aware of environmental racism, but the term has usually been labeled differently and identified as environmental manipulation or destruction of traditional land use areas.

Although all the participants provided a plethora of examples within the constructs of environmental racism, perhaps Yvonne Vizina's response best explains the systemic nature of the phenomenon and how it has impacted her peoples:

Environmental racism is a feature that Métis across Canada have been coping with for a very long time. Really, since the earliest times of colonization, Métis have been prohibited from having access to land and water systems in the way

that they did traditionally. Systemic denial of Métis rights to hunt, fish, trap, or harvest was the anchor to more serious forms of permanent disconnection to lands and waters. People were not allowed to live on what is now considered Crown land. Also, the desire for people to have access to schools for their children, healthcare and other services meant that fewer people were able to live full time out on the land. Having an education was important to most Métis people; unfortunately, the form of education was European (British or French) and there was no understanding by those authorities on the importance of continuity of cultural and linguistic traditions. In fact, they were actively discouraged as being ‘savage’ and people were shamed into relinquishing some traditional lifestyles. I think it is important to understand the mind-set of colonial society over the past couple of hundred years because it formed the dominant thinking and had a very strong influence on the thinking of Métis also.

Although environmental racism is not culture specific, it is systemic. Here Yvonne talks about the insidious nature of environmental racism:

So, I guess that environmental racism is systemic in nature because it is not one particular thing or another, but a whole system of things that attacks the heart and mind of a people and forces them to adapt new ways of living.

Like the *Iqaluk*, Joan Scottie has the qualities of longevity, strength and agility as she has been jumping through the waters of the Nunavummiut for more than thirty years. Her resistance of uranium mining development and exploration near her home territory of Baker Lake, Nunavut is well known to both executives in mining companies and anti-nuclear activists world round. She is a living model of wellness and traditional

knowledge as she not only supports young people as they learn with her on the land and waters, but as she advocates on behalf of the trappers and Elders of Baker Lake. Her concerns about the fragility of the land are directly connected to the wellness of her peoples and it is evident that the context of environmental racism is showing itself in her community.

We have been negatively impacted by industry activities (ongoing helicopter noise, diamond drilling, geo-phy surveys etc.) for over 30 years. This is extensive exploration for uranium and other minerals. Our environment is so fragile and damage could be devastating, also with climate change. The way most in the mining industry think that toxic wastes can be buried deep into the permafrost is no guarantee. Presently, nothing is scared to our regulatory agencies.

Environmental racism encompasses the dismissal of Indigenous views, when those protecting homelands resist industry actions, and their voices are eliminated or diminished. A specific example of this disregard is Darrell Greer's Editorial Comment in the Kivalliq News (February 25, 2009). In a written response to Greer's comment, Joan Scottie expressed her anger when the media and the Nunavut Impact Review Board (NIRB) slam-dunked, double-spoke and embarrassed the Elders of Baker Lake:

I am so incensed I can't think in English after reading Darrell Greer's editorial comment about Areva's proposed uranium mine west of Baker Lake. Has Mr. Greer ever heard of cultural values other than his own? Before he writes another know it all and uninformed editorial, he should get his facts straight. We are Inuit, with our own cultural values and traditional beliefs. How long do we have to live with people like Mr. Greer preaching to us about where and how to find our

brighter future? Sure, we want our community to evolve and prosper. But that means making our own choices and decisions and, in making those choices, we listen to our elders (Scottie, 2009, para 1).

When the Elders of Baker Lake expressed their concerns to Scottie about a proposal by URAVAN she explained to them that they could provide comments and write whatever they would like in syllabic to the NIRB. The media however reported something entirely different and she addressed the faux pas in this way:

A few weeks ago, when there was an opportunity to comment to NIRB on a proposal by Uravan, the media reported people from Baker did not speak out and that embarrassed and angered people in town. Most people didn't know how or where to participate in the discussion, as there was no public process and no one showed any interest or took the time to listen to our concerns. The current screening and review process is not designed for Inuit to have access or to participate. Most Inuit don't use the Internet or know how to use an FTP site to review a mining company's application to NIRB. Scrap the whole process and replace it with a real Inuit based process designed by, and for, Inuit. The editorial called the opinions expressed suspect because the HTO offered prizes in a raffle among those who came out in a blizzard to write their input. This is common practice in every community. Both NTI and KIA do it all the time at their meetings. Are they suspecting? The prizes offered by the HTO are nothing compared with the money and gifts handed out by Areva and other mining companies. I guess you believe any support for their activities is suspect. People did not participate because of the prizes. This is an insult to those who wrote

down their opposition. The environment and wildlife are a lot more important than a \$15 prize. As one person wrote: “The caribou are like a million dollars to us.” A uranium mine, which has never been done in Nunavut or in permafrost, will have a very significant effect on our way of life. We have a right to be satisfied all requirements for our health and safety are met. You seem to be saying tailings and contaminates are no longer issues in uranium mining. Then why are so many of our Canadian neighbours opposed to uranium mining in their lands? Do they know something you're not telling us? (Scottie, 2009, para 2).

The Uravan project is no small deal. It consists of 355 mining claims covering 829,171 acres located in the Garry Lake area, northeast of the Thelon Basis. This location is about 245 kilometers northwest of Baker Lake and 170 kilometers northwest of Kiggavik- Andrew Lake uranium deposit that is being developed by AREVA resources Canada. The people of Baker Lake are bombarded by exploration and campaign aggression. There is no let up from this activity, which includes helicopter noise, diamond drilling, and geophysical and geochemical surveying. Collectively, these activities directly impact the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq herds’ calving and post-calving areas and the communities situated along the caribou ranges from Lac Brochet in Manitoba, to Wollaston Lake and Black Lake in Saskatchewan, and to Baker Lake and Arviat in Nunavut. Scottie is alarmed at the impact pro-uranium campaigns have on the young people and how their voices are being shut down: “I am often approached by young people that are too embarrassed or too intimidated to speak out,” Scottie says. “They have concerns about their future and the future of their children in a contaminated land.” (Caribou News in Brief, July 2007, para 5). She is concerned that both

government officials and Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI) offer a double-edged sword to the people of Nunavut, in that their messages about mining continue to espouse the safety of uranium, rather than providing one of balance. She believes their goal is to advance uranium mining rather than to ensure regulatory measures are in place for the protection of lands as defined within the land claims agreement. She is equally concerned about the aspect of “job blackmail” (Bullard, 1994) and the vulnerable state that many Inuit endure due to a high rate of unemployment. She believes this psychological unraveling is further deepened and imposed upon the peoples through the messages of the NTI and the government.

As a regulatory body, the NTI, is responsible for the carrying out the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement and it has on more than one occasion sided with the development of mining over the protection of sensitive ecological sites, and in particular the caribou calving grounds and migratory paths. As Scottie hears frightened voices and the voices of those who are made to look foolish, she believes the NTI has tried to minimize her concern for young people, the caribou and the land. She has long criticized the NTI for not consulting the people and she shares that the previous Vice President of NTI, James Eetoolook, has on occasion, approached and cajoled her:

“NTI responded by telling me that nuclear energy is used for peaceful and environmentally responsible purposes, that uranium mining in Nunavut brings significant economic benefits to the people of the local communities, to the region, to Nunavut and to Canada, that uranium mining is carried out in a manner that protects the health and safety of the workers and all Nunavummiut, that uranium mining will not cause significant adverse effects on the environment or

wildlife, and that community members are given an opportunity for full and meaningful participation in both the environmental assessment process and the operations of uranium mining projects,” says Scottie. (Caribou News in Brief, July, 2006, para 5).

Like Scottie, Elders Richardson, Adam and Blackbird have encountered the impact of environmental racism for many years. Rose Richardson speaks about the reality of this situation and the impact on Métis traditional territory:

Environmental racism is displayed in our community in many ways. There is a focus on industrial uses of the land, to the detriment of traditionally used, natural resources [and a] lack of economic support for projects that have a sustainable cultural focus, while modern, industrial, non-labour intensive activities have a great deal of support from governmental agencies and funding sources. Our traditional lands are being destroyed by clear-cut logging operations, tourist trade, big game and trophy hunting, and other aspects that interfere and change the environment, destroying the natural habitat within our ecosystem. Traditionally, many areas of our lands were used for harvesting of berries and other plants and for hunting and trapping. These lands were used by wild animals for breeding grounds and to support themselves and forestry efforts do not consider nesting and calving times of moose, deer and other animals.

Like Scottie and Richardson, Adam and Blackbird have been watching the land and waters for many years. Elder Marie Adam speaks of the reality of Alberta’s oil production and her concern about the vast area of lands and waters that have been impacted by industry: “One would only have to see how much of our lands are destroyed

by the industries. This is very sad to see”. Her knowledge of the ecologies found within traditional Dene lands spider across seven decades, three prairie provinces, and the Arctic. In the past few years, she has shared her concerns with millions of Canadians; she has been interviewed by CBC, visited by David Suzuki, and filmed by Green Peace Canada. Perhaps her largest role is in meeting school children, and in the sharing her traditional knowledge, here, and in the boardrooms of oil executives. She is often conflicted by the reality that her own children work in the oil industry, with the exception of Kuni (her youngest daughter is an environmentalist). Marie told me about her meetings, and the hearings she attends as an Elder representing *Treaty 8 Territory*, “I ask them what they are going to do and what will be left for their great grandchildren as well as my great grandchildren. They never answer,” (Adam, conversation, March 8, 2014). While she believes this *progress* hurts *Mother Earth*, her greatest fears are centered on the reality that those in industry and government do not respect the values and knowledges of Indigenous peoples, they do not adhere to principles of sustainability, (western or Indigenous), and most importantly, how they disguise themselves as caring professionals in a civil process while they continue on a destructive path imploding more and more of northern Alberta, and her peoples’ homelands. As Marie speaks of the Athabasca River, and the land and waters of her childhood, she muses about the demise of the earth today:

Oh my god, yes, because you know it’s the industry, the government; it’s the government that’s doing all this. They will not see, will not listen, they cannot. I don’t know why; they’re supposed to be smart people, but my way of thinking ... they are not smart. Because they’re not thinking, not thinking about their great, great grandchildren. But I’ve told them that. I’ve gone to a lot of oil meetings,

and I have done some presentations, and I [have] said, “You’re not going to leave anything for your great grandchildren. Because there’s not going to be anything left for them, and then what are you going to do?” And stuff like that, but they don’t care. A lot of them sit there and listen, and some of them will come up and say, “It’s a very good presentation, what you are saying is so true, what our children and our great grandchildren have to face”, stuff like that. Yeah, and they go back [to their corporate offices] and make all this big money. It’s all about money; it’s not about life on *Mother Earth*.

In her role as a policy analyst for the Métis National Office, Yvonne Vizina had opportunity to visit northern Alberta. She echoes Marie Adams’s concerns about tars sands development:

Any industry or development will negatively impact the health of lands and waters. But it is not just the industries and developments at a particular site; it is an accumulation of effects. So, for example, several years ago, I had an opportunity to visit and tour the Alberta oil sands development with some elected Métis officials. We went there to discuss the possibility of jobs for Métis from Northern Saskatchewan. People wanted jobs. We saw the huge machinery and how they extract the Earth. I remember thinking how amazing human beings are to create these complex industrial systems. They also showed us some areas of reclamation which looked more or less back to normal because they would peel the top layer of grass and dirt off, roll it up, dig out the oil sands, then later fill it in and replace the turf. They even had bison there to show how healthy it was. But, I found after being at the industrial site for several hours, my head started to

hurt terribly and I felt sick from the smell of petroleum. Soon I had to go and lay down, and was unable to even lift my head off my pillow or move for the next two days. I have never forgotten how sick I felt. I felt poisoned from the smell. I realize that people want, and need jobs, but I am coming to realize that as a collective human society we don't really know when to quit. We don't know when to say the damages are too great for what we want. I think it all goes back to the idea that more development somehow makes you a more civilized person. I worry that in the future that need/greed will consume the boreal forest of Northern Saskatchewan since there is oil up there too.

Like Vizina and Adam, Tammy Cook-Searson, Chief of the Lac La Ronge Indian Band, has many thoughts regarding land use specifically around resource development and agriculture. When I met with her she voiced concern over the political process of land distribution and the realities Indigenous people continue to experience through systemic colonization:

The ways the permits are issued by the provincial government regardless if we have opposition to it or not, I think that's environmental racism. ...it's almost like there's a total disregard of us being the first people here, and having a treaty and agreeing to share the land, and then just the way the resources were given to the province in the 1930's. That [is a] total disrespect of the First Nations people, saying this is all of Saskatchewan's lands and resources.

She spoke of the *tipascanikimow*, 'those that measure up the land' (Woodlands Cree word gifted to me by Cook-Searson, 2012) and the Homesteaders Act, and like Vizina,

she has concerns about how the land was divided up and given to white settlers. Yvonne had this to say about the land parceling:

It's interesting when you think about even how the land is used, regardless of who is using it, how the land is used. You know when you think of this idea of an imposition of a set of a certain race's ideology in the management of the environment. Now if you fly over the prairies, you see a patchwork quilt. It's quite amazing, when you see it, oh my gosh, there's not a tree anywhere. I mean there are some, it's like field to field to field to field, and I think, whose plan was that? You know, clearly, there wasn't a plan. And you wonder [about] the animals. How do they navigate from, is that their habitat, this thin little gully in between fields or a little tiny row of spruce trees that's been planted as wind breaker or something?

Cook-Searson reflects further on aspects of land regulations and on how Aboriginal peoples traditionally engaged in gathering and harvesting, and how they were opposed, arrested and controlled by both the provincial and federal governments. The hidden brutality of yesterday endures today:

Like my mom said, "Did you know that our people, if they heard a plane coming they had to run into the bush and hide their food", 'cause they couldn't kill beaver, they were so controlled. All their furs were taken, and their cabins burned; they still go burning cabins here.

Just as Tammy Cook-Searson has, Elder Stella Blackbird has been watching *progress* while sustaining herself and her family within lands covering vast tracts of Cree, Oji-Cree, and Metis traditional knowledges:

Berries have disappeared from our area, we can't access and farmers post "no trespassing". We are limited to what we can preserve. On the road allowances, we used to pick, but now there are too many chemicals and the plants are not healthy. Plus, our water, the river, Little Saskatchewan. 50 years ago or more, we had spring water and we drank the water. Wells are now contaminated; they tested mine, Health Canada, which I don't drink. At Keeseekoowenin, our lake, Clear Lake, you can't swim in it too long. They polluted the lake with too many boats. They are limited now but it is damaged. There is duck itch and the boats. On Moon Lake there are no boats, just canoes. In Lake Oddie, you can't swim and we used to be able to. We also used to have to pay camping fees but no more. Logging camps, chemicals from farming, planes dusting crops are changing how animals grow. One bear had five cubs, also moose have three; it is changing. Last year we looked for saskatoons; they used to be plentiful and last year there was none here. The same with Beardy's. We used to pick chokecherries, we used to dry them and they would last all winter. They used to hang like grapes at Beardy's. White glove willow, we would get the berries, and use silver powder for medicinal purposes. Inside there is a seed; this year I found one. The leaf is used to make teething powder. The leaves of blue berries are used for a mind medium.

The women speak of agriculture, tourism, mining, oil and gas developments and hydro projects impacting their land. For many the impact on the vitality of cultural sustainability weighs heavy and for Ila Bussidor, the lost independence of her peoples defines what has impacted her most:

My dad was a provider, he could go all over his territory without a map and never get lost, never freeze to death, never starve or anything like that. And then once he was taken away from that and put into an alien environment, he could no longer be independent and proud as a man to provide for his family. Now all of a sudden there was a language barrier, like if he had to go and find a job, the skills that he needed to drive a truck, he didn't know how to speak English. He didn't have the skills to drive a truck but he could go on his dog team from his home way up into the Territories and come back without getting lost. He had the freedom to work in his own environment but once that was taken away, the independence, the pride, the dignity, everything was taken away from the men. Now they had to rely on an outside piece of paper that said, "Here, you can go to the store to buy food for your family", like a welfare food voucher, something that was different, new. But then they became dependent on the system. Maybe that's the way it was designed so that my dad could no longer be independent, and now somebody else is controlling what his destiny is going to be, taken away from the land. And I know somewhere in your words here you talk about the environment and the racism [that exists]. So that's a good example of [environmental racism], an independent, strong man, and that was his generation taken away and all of a sudden they're no longer like that. I think when you take control like that away from somebody, then, of course, they're going to go down to exactly where you want them to be.

Yvonne Vizina, the girl who grew up in the parklands of Saskatchewan, speaks to me of a form of environmental racism, one that rarely makes the news, as one which has

permeated her very core and she believes, the hearts of many Indigenous peoples in urban Canada:

...another form of environmental racism is being an urbanite and having no chance of connecting to your heritage, to your land, knowing intimately, knowing the land. There's no place for you to go.

The dislocation of place and from place is a theme that continues to vibrate among the words of the *Sisters*. The compounding of this displacement filters into the negativity, hurtful actions and sometimes brutality found in the lives of many Indigenous peoples today.

Perhaps, the most profound thing that Yvonne said about environmental racism was something that hit me inside the core of who I am, a small town prairie girl living on the land, and being one and the same as my brothers and sisters, living life well on a big farm, a large ranch really, with vast tracts of land in the south of Saskatchewan:

There's a famous author from Saskatchewan who writes beautifully about Saskatchewan landscapes and experiences. A beautifully written book. And our professor asked us, "What did you think about this book? Did anyone not love it?" I said, "You know what, this woman is a beautiful writer, beautiful, I mean you're just there, you're touching the grass, you're feeling the wind. I mean she just brings it alive, right. But every time I picked up that book, I had a really hard time to get through it. I just felt angry and I'm not a person easily provoked to anger". I remember this coming out of my mouth, that I just want to hurl that book across the room every time I picked it up. Because of all those rancher experiences, whatever, were experiences that our people could never have,

because we couldn't afford or had been pushed off the land for agricultural purposes. That's a very large piece of environmental racism in Canada today. After reading this reflection over, and over again, I felt some relief in knowing my own mother experienced distress about this book in the same way that Yvonne Vizina had, and now, as I enter place of Métissage, I think I understand how they feel.

Be Still My Heart – Reflection

When I drove up to Rose Richardson's home near Green Lake, Saskatchewan, in the heart of a Métis homeland, I saw what I thought was the most unusual sight. Framed by a bright blue sky, within a spattering of cloud, were two great grey owls perched high on a power pole. One doesn't usually see the greys hunting at this time of day but I did, and I knew later as the day unfolded that this was a sign of something important. As I watched from a distance, one of them beckoned me, providing a show of brilliance, while the other grey watched me observing its mate. Like the *Lii Yiiboo*, (Michif word for owl), the Métis sisters, Rose Richardson and Yvonne Vizina, see much in the daylight, however their clarity in the dark of night may be strongest. When I think of *Lii Yiiboo*, I think of the way in which Yvonne and Rose see the world, through *Etuaptmunk*, "two-eyed seeing." Much like the Great Grey Owl, they are friendly cautious leaders who exhibit their openness to others while 'seeing' how to come to a place of reflective decision-making. The symbolic importance of the Great Grey, the *Lii Yiiboo*, is found in the power of a collective women's wisdom, most of that coming from first hand experience. It seems that all the women in *Sisters* encompass traits of the *Lii Yiiboo*. Within this metaphorical examination, each has flown like the Great Grey while developing the type of leadership and composure that is required to protect peoples and

homelands. The *Lii Yiiboo* is a reflective creature, one that has excellent hearing and vision, and with a feathered body built for hunting, she is a quiet flyer who listens intently before instigating the hit of a target. The women in this research are the same. Each in her own way is quiet about the goals pursued, each does not take her eyes off the target, and each has the kind of focus required to look at multiple decisions and choose the best or most useful ones for her kinship. The Great Grey does not migrate, however, she shows signs of being nomadic, and in the same way, these women have and continue to travel their traditional territories across Turtle Island and *Mother Earth*, as they do their work. It is in their homeland, however, where they feel most comfort and it is here that they recharge and reflect upon what has transpired and what they must do. Yvonne Vizina outlines some important questions in this reflection:

Well in Canada, I think the Métis would be the poster children for environmental racism. Because when you think about it, First Nations, you know have some small very tiny little land bases, but they've also had some established rights under treaties. Inuit now have land claims, before huge land claim areas, they work to develop you know, what's good for Inuit in those places. But the Métis haven't had anything. We have had to use the court system to advance every right basically that has even been gained and for people who are poor and don't have a lot of resources at their disposal, that a big challenge. So how do you fight for your rights? How do you use a foreign system, a colonial legal system that costs million of dollars to take a case all the way to the Supreme Court? How do you do that? And who advocates? The federal government is not going to advocate

for giving Métis people rights. So I think our history has been rife with injustices and that continues to grow.

The diminishment of cultural substantiality, the poisoning of ecosystems and plant and animal life, the infusion of eurocentric control, and the internalized shame and fear of being “a native” is saturated within the context of environmental racism and felt deeply by Indigenous peoples around the globe. Environmental racism is a large contributor to the social and physical demise of Indigenous health and wellness, and it is well known that the subsequent illnesses found in Indigenous communities throughout Canada create chaos in the day to day lives of Aboriginal peoples (Fineday, 2010). The historical dislocation of the Métis and the insidious racism of earlier times are in part responsible for much of the physical and cultural poverty they now endure. Rose Richardson has a long history of understanding poverty. She explains:

Well as a young kid, I was dirt poor. My dad left us when I was about four years old. And I always believed my dad left us because when I was a kid, because I was the only dark one in the family and all my siblings were fair, and I figured my dad left us because I looked really native, and I grew up with that feeling. And because we were dirt poor and my mother raised us and we didn't have any welfare and or any ways to survive. Well I grew up, raised by a single parent, my mother, who had no education but knew how to live off the land, raised in Meadow Lake, Meadow Lake area. I know that my mom was really strong because we didn't have anything and we survived. I remember going to court with my mom because the welfare ended up saying that in order to get welfare she'd have to take my dad to court. And we went to court and everybody was

afraid to go and be an interpreter for my mom, because my mom talked a mixture of French/Cree mostly, and the courts were held in English. So, the only one to go and speak for my mom was myself and I was only six years old. And I didn't know anything about court. But when the judge asked, to see if my mom had a case like this before or something like that, I didn't know how to explain it to my mom, in terms of interpreting that statement. I was only about six, so I ended up asking my mom, to see if she had *la boit*, something like that before. So a case to me became a box, *la boit*, and I remember leaving the courtroom because it got kicked out of court. Because my mom said, "*la boit, kakway, la boit?*" You know, and I told her it's a little jewelry box she had on top of the dresser, to see if she had another one like [that]. Well, the judge just let it go and then we walked home, and then as we got out of town in Meadow, my mom was holding my hand, walking really fast and my mother cried and I walked beside her and I cried. And I cried because nothing happened in court and we still had no food. And the teacher said if we went and saw the welfare, they would help us and we did, and they didn't.

Although the Métis, the Mi'kmaq, the Innu, the Inuit and other Indigenous peoples have suffered greatly through re-location, perhaps this form of environmental racism has influenced the wellness of the Sayisi Dene like no other Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The travesty of this re-location, in what has come to be known as Canada's cultural genocide, lingers among their kinship.

Most Canadians do not know that during the 1960's and the 1970's, when Canada was booming, building, and inventing, my people were caught in this nightmare.

Along with our independence, our innocence, and many lives, we lost immeasurable potential. We lost the potential of generations of children yet to be born, and the knowledge of our elders and parents, who took their wisdom with them when they died in Churchill (Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 2000, p.5).

The lined sadness in the face of Ila Bussidor shows her worry. She knows her people are sick, they are suffering, and they live in poverty due to the colonial impact of relocation. In 1956, the year after Ila Bussidor was born, the Sayisi Dene were forcefully moved from their traditional lands to the outskirts of Churchill. This move was part of the government's scheme to control the harvesting of caribou in northern Manitoba and to assimilate the Sayisi Denesuline. At that time, the Department of Natural Resources knew really very little of the complexities of caribou, their migration and their populations' health, yet bureaucratic measures of control and the final judgment that found the Dene guilty of slaughtering too many caribou resulted in a generational travesty like no other. She cites the narrative of John Solomon to explain how her own father tried to resist this move:

The people from the Department of Natural Resources started coming around and they implied we were slaughtering the caribou. When we had Treaty Days in July 1956, there was a meeting in a tent. I wasn't inside but I stood outside for a while and heard that the move was mentioned. It was said we would be closer to the medical services if we moved near Churchill. The Hudson Bay manager never said anything. I think it was the people for the Department of Natural Resources and from the Department of Indian Affairs who wanted to move us...Artie Cheekie, who was the chief at the time, spoke at that meeting. He said, " Our

people are here because the caribou come here. There are plenty of fish on these connecting lakes and that's why this trading post was built here, to be near us. What is there for us to live on in Churchill?" (Solomon in Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 2000, p. 45).

Ila Bussidor tells me she is greatly worried for the young people of Tadoule Lake, as they have incurred generations of the hurt and trauma associated with re-location. Although the move to Tadoule Lake has helped the Sayisi Dene, and the Government of Manitoba has apologized for their role in this travesty, the blood memory of their ancestors' hurt continues to permeate their souls. The following testimonial of John Solomon shows how isolation and compounded desperation consumed a people. The filter of that time is reflected in the struggles of those Sayisi Dene who continue to search for self-determination and peace:

The plane came with three white people plus the pilot. They said they came to move the people. The people never replied. We took whatever we could with us, we left behind our traps, our toboggans, our cabins, and we got into the plane. When we got out in Churchill, there were no trees. The wind was blowing sand on everything. We didn't know what to do next. We couldn't do anything there. We couldn't go trapping. We couldn't set a net. There was nothing to hunt. We were in a desperate state. We had nothing to live on. (Solomon in Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart, 2000, p. 46).

Today as many struggle with addictions, alcohol, drugs and gambling, Bussidor is concerned about the loss of traditional knowledge and language and history, and she expresses angst about the mounting evidence of poverty, substance abuse and lateral

violence found in her community. She knows how the young people suffer; she herself has fought addiction and the night spirits of their collective horror for many years:

“I was living in Winnipeg, taking courses, but I was living for the weekend. That's when we would go to the bar and drink all night and smoke up.” On a trip back to Churchill, she visited the community where her parents had lived. Years after the fire, the ashes had not been removed. “I had been drinking heavily. I don't know how I got there. I was crying, wondering what am I doing here? Then I just sobered up. I said I would never do that again. I believe that my mom and my dad were there. They wanted me to realize that you can't live like this. Their love for us had been so deep. I left Churchill and came to Tadoule Lake. And I decided to write something to honour them, to honour the young people who died in Churchill. The spirits are listening.” (Smith, D. 1998).

Like some of the other women of *Sisters*, Ila Bussidor has lived through more than 50 years of oppression and colonization. The land near Tadoule Lake remains intact, but she wonders for how long as she worries about further exploitation of her peoples and their traditional lands: “The community today is still in poverty. There is high rate of suicide, addiction—you name it, it is a third world community.” Although Ila continues to work toward self-determination for her peoples, she has been side railed by much of the political maneuvering of current governments and those leaders who are, in her analysis, shortsighted about political negotiations led by the federal government, the mining industry and lawyers.

We are in negotiations with Canada, Land Claims, [and have been for] 14 years now. DeBeers Diamond Mines are now coming to our people to see if they can get an agreement to extract minerals from our traditional lands.

As a collective people who were beautiful, proud, dignified and strong, she wonders how the survivors will regain independence and a new self-determination to return to that status. The *North of 60 Land Claim*, and the relocation claim of the Sayisi Dene has still not been resolved, more than 15 years after she first approached the federal government and the then Indian & Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) Minister, Joan Stewart:

That's where it started then when Nunavut was being created by the Federal government. The Federal government refused to see that there was a third party involved, which is us Dene people. The territory and the names of the lakes and everything is all in Dene. And they're trying to say that the Dene were never there ... and then so the Prime Minister was trying to go to Iqaluit, you know, at the eleventh hour, kind of thing. Then I started talking to the legal council and the other leaders, and I said, "We have to get to Ottawa, we'll take a bunch of people there. I don't know how we're going to do it, but you start advocating and I'll do the same thing". We start advocating. We got their province involved, I contacted a childhood friend of mine. And we just advocated everywhere and we got the money. We took probably over a hundred people from Tadoule Lake and Lac Brochet. There was a bus charter from the communities to Thompson or Winnipeg and then the charter bus to Ottawa. We had seventeen drummers on the Hill drumming. And then the leaders, they had to go into the Minister's office, to try to negotiate, you know like "What are you doing ... making land claim agreements, creating a

territory for one Indigenous group and you forget about us. That's wrong." We so did that and then we got a negotiating table for land claims. She didn't want to say yes, Jane Stewart.

So me and this other leader were together with all these other people. We had about fifteen, ten minutes with her. She didn't really want to have anybody in her office and then she wouldn't give anything. So I said to the other leader "Let's try this ourselves" and we talked in Dene. I said, "We've got only a few minutes left and we can walk out of here with nothing." And so the rest of the people were told to leave and we sat with her, with the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jane Stewart, at that time. I said to her "You go out there," I said, "your job is that you represent the Aboriginal people of Canada, that's what your job is. If you do not believe that my people have rights, have Aboriginal rights, have Aboriginal title to our traditional territory, our ancestral lands, then you go out there and tell them yourself, because I'm not going to do it for you. Tell them that they came all the way over here for nothing, that you don't believe that we have rights." I said, "That's your job, you tell them. I'm not going to do it for you. If we leave here without anything, I'll continue to fight for what's rightfully ours." Then she went out there and she said [she would] arrange a meeting to talk about how we can work together and then, eventually out of that, the negotiating table, they gave us a mandate to negotiate. The Sixty it's called. That was going on fourteen years ago and it is still going on.

Today Ila Bussidor prays. The Elders have blessed her, she is a carrier of the pipe, and she knows redemption may be found only through healing. How that healing looks and what actions are required and may transpire, whether through necessity or crisis, she is

not entirely sure. One thing she does know is the preservation of peoples and land will only come with a return to tradition and an embrace of the teachings.

Like Bussidor, Elder Marie Adam is reflective on the land of the past, the traditions that have been dismantled and the young who need to lead the next generation. She tells me about the Athabasca River, the land around Fond du Lac, Saskatchewan and the realities of what it is like to live in Fort McMurray, Alberta today. As she thinks back to her childhood, her concern rests with the women and the children of our nation and she believes their health and wellness is tied directly to the land:

I spend a lot of time alone. And so I think about when I went through trials and what I went through and what it was like when I was traveling by boat and saw how beautiful the places were, everything was so fresh. And I think about losing it. But even thinking of dog teams, like we would go from the trap line back to the village. He put us all in a sleigh, us kids and covered us with blankets, always a feather blanket, runner from underneath the sleigh, it was just like falling asleep in the car. So today a lot of these things that I think about [influence me], what it was like then and what is happening now.

As young as she is, Jennifer Watkins recognizes the impact that environmental racism has on her peoples and she tells me, “38% of our people are said to be living in poverty in Nunavik and the high cost of living is a big factor on why people are unhealthy.” She faces the realities of ill health, child mortality, diabetes, HIV, and suicide and mental illness each day as she assists her people in her life work; she strives to do more, however, she recognizes the significant resistances that she is faced with. The ominous issue of poverty and the compounding effects of poor health among the

Inuit worry her as much as the land grab by industry. When I ask her about the high incidences of mental illness and suicide in Nunavut she tells me this:

There is so much trauma, sexual abuse, physical violence, family violence; parents have lived through the legacy of residential schools and the pain, plus the dog slaughter issue of the 50' and 60's.

Relaying the history of her peoples is important to Watkins as she believes all youth must learn about their past. The impact of assimilation hits her hard when she tells me a story about her grandmother and the shooting of her great grandfather's sled dogs in another little known government and police procedure that in large part contributes to the dysfunctional health of today's Inuit youth. Although these acts took place primarily during the 1950's and 60's, this brutal imposition continues to reverberate among the people of Kuujuaq today. When *Qimmit: A Clash of Two Truths* was released by the National Film Board, the Nunavut filmmaker, Joelle Sanguya, told CBC news that many among the Inuit have been seeking the truth, and he believes when reality surfaces again, there will be "one truth from the RCMP and another truth from the Inuit who had their dogs killed". Jennifer tells me about what she called the "dog slaughter" or *qimmijjaqtauniq*:

In the early 50's and 60's the RCMP came to the north and started shooting the dogs. They did this so people would live in communities and they wouldn't be scattered in camps, so they started shooting their dogs, and the dogs were a form of transportation and this affected a lot of them. It affected the men, that was their source, their power to get food for their family, for their children. That was their manly-hood and it was taken away from them. And that's happened here and it

happened to my grandfather, and my grandmother, because my grandfather, in the mid 60's, he was working for a mining company, and he was always out, working. And my grandmother she was the provider for my mother and my uncle, and my uncle had two kids at that time. So my great grandfather gave her his set of dogs that she used when she went out, but one time she went out, she went to go out and get some firewood to have heat in her tent, and when she was out cutting wood, her dogs were shot. So she had to walk back, down to my uncle, devastated, having to tell her parents that her dogs were just shot.

It has been estimated more than 20,000 sled dogs in eastern Nunavut were systematically killed as part of a plan to force the Inuit to abandon their traditional camps, however, the number may have been much higher. Although RCMP officers may have followed what they understood as the 'law', many Inuit did not understand why this was happening. To the Inuit hunters "it was illogical, unnecessary and harmful, as well as inconsistently and unpredictably applied" as many Inuit lost their traditionally based livelihoods and became "dependent on welfare and store-bought food" (*Qikiqtani Truth Commission*, 2010, p. 24, 25). This practice went on into the mid 1970's and it was justified by a formal RCMP report diminishing the impact of the slaughter on the Inuit way of life. In a response to the 2006 RCMP report, the Qikiqtani Inuit Association set up the *Qikiqtani Truth Commission* (2007) to investigate the dog slaughter and other social impacts placed upon the Inuit of Nunavik. The published report, based on the Commission's visitations to 13 communities across Baffin Island, highlights a series of opposing narratives. The recollections of more than 200 Inuit traditionalists, Elders and women continue to act as the counter-story of this tragedy.

An additional little known example of environmental racism can be found in the stories of the Inuit elders of Kuujjuaq, Quebec. In 1984, about a hundred kilometers south of Kuujjuaq, on the homelands of Jennifer Watkins, more than 10,000 caribou drowned while crossing the Caniapiscou River, a travesty with direct links to Hydro Quebec and its subsidiary, Société d'énergie de la Baie James. To this day the aforementioned companies dispute the link of the drowning caribou and the reservoir changes responsible for such a travesty, and through their actions and even inactions, the hydro companies continue to directly oppose and dismiss what the Inuit hunters and traditional knowledge keepers of Kuujjuaq advance. Watkins muses, "I'm very nervous about the whole idea of the caribou herd. The George River herd has been impacted [by hydro development, mining, forestry]. Tourism has really affected them." Others watching the environment and the vitality of its species expose the destructive resistance of industry and sanction the counter-storied and revitalizing actions of the women in *Sisters*. Although young, Watkins carries the ancestral memories of her grandparents and her great grandparents before them. Her depth of understanding is shared with many sitting around boardroom and kitchen table alike:

Once our land is ruined, we cannot change it. Plus, compensation to our people will always run out. The financial aspects are not what I'm concerned with. I'm concerned about our beautiful vast land, that which will never be the same once the mining or dams start their projects. Changed forever and never to be the same again.

She expresses her concerns about traditional lands and waters altered by industry, and the consequential impact on life and the livelihoods of her peoples:

At the moment our lands are healthy but once mining occurs, I expect to see some damage or effects on our hunting grounds, and on the fishing and animals that live or migrate on these potential sites. The mining sites or hydro dams can affect the water levels, and our marine mammals will be deeply affected by this.

Watkins' reflection draws attention to the issues impacting human health and the correlation of health indicators to land wellness. She and the other *Sisters* in this research express concern about the significant health issues that are a side effect of environmental racism. As Joan Scottie worries about the implications of land development and neo-colonialism, her concern takes in the reality of climate change and the interdependence of all species. The impact of industrial activity contributes greatly to the social change seen in her community. She believes it has played a significant role in the demise of human health:

There are many drug, alcohol, mental health issues [in Baker Lake] and even health services issues [are compounded]... problems are always two times as much, harder and piling up. There's a high rate of suicide among our youth.

Another concern is in the last 15 years, there seems to be a high rate of cancer in our community.

Back in 1990, more than nine years before Nunavut was created, and a few years after Scottie founded the *Baker Lake Concerned Citizens Committee* with the support of her community, a plebiscite vote on the Kiggavik uranium mine development found 90% of Baker Lake citizens were opposed to such development. Today as she continues her work with the Baker Lake Trappers and Hunters to protect Inuit lands and waters, she expresses concern over the kind of community relations those in government and industry

bombard the Nunavummiut (residents of Nunavut or Nunavik) with. The building of “uranium positive” campaigns, the one-sided propagandas and falsehoods, the “buy-offs” in prizes and trinkets to bring the Nunavummiut on side, as well as the whitewashing of Inuit concerns by the media, are among her greatest concerns:

I think our youth/children are confused. There are teachers and other influential figures with education who think they know better answers than our traditional ones. Older, traditional natives are often not ‘aggressive’ enough to argue what is best for our culture and community.

Her concern regarding social and physical health of humans and other life forms and her ongoing work to protect the voices of Elders and young people remain in her forefront.

As traditional healers, Elders Rose Richardson and Stella Blackbird hold plant medicines in esteem. They are well aware of the historical and neocolonial impacts that influence the health of both people and other life forms, and the ecosystems within which they live. Researchers who explore human wellness determinants and the correlations of human and *Earth* health support their understandings. *State of The Knowledge Inuit Public Health* (2011), *Inuit Observations on Climate Change* (2012), *The Words of Our Ancestors: Metis Health and Healing* (2008) and *Pushed to the Edge of Extinction - Racism against Indigenous Peoples of Canada* (2001) are four public sources which outline the grave concerns of environmental racism and its impact on human and other life forms. The historical factors implicating neo-colonialism, poverty and poor health are clearly outlined within the Métis report and they consist of the following categorizations: loss of Aboriginal identity; death of family member due to infectious diseases; loss of access to the land and resources; loss of access to hunting, fishing and

trapping; loss of traditional teachings and ceremony; experience of violence and abuse; relocation and displacement; and generational fallout from residential school trauma.

The women in *Sisters* have identified all of these losses in their testimonies. Richardson has this to say:

The root cause of illness and poor health is often related to poor economic conditions and a deliberate weakening of cultural knowledge, by generations of government policies. The traditional diet has suffered, by modern policies.

Pharmaceutical companies encourage the taking of industrially produced drugs, and try to convince many that our traditional medicines are not to be trusted.

Generations of church indoctrination have led many to believe that our old ways are evil and not to be used.

Métis partners, Rose and Ric Richardson have long opposed forestry and uranium industries, and they continue to advance Métis sustainability and ecological renewal as an antidote to what they see as environmental racism. As educators and harvesters, they travel the boreal forest to collect herbs, berries and other plants as they advocate for a return to past knowledges and a greener way to live. Like *Lii Yiiboo*, Elder Rose Richardson has a first hand experience as a medicine woman, and she holds ancestral spirit knowings gifted to her as a small child. This gift is rarely obvious to outsiders, and only periodically will she share the depth of that knowledge, as to how these spirits lead her to where the sought plant lives. When plants are offered to her, she honours them, and she speaks to them. She intuitively knows who shall receive these medicines and how, and who shall not. I have personally witnessed how her willingness to share *Earth's* medicines is offered to those who indicate a willingness to be open to Indigenous

ceremony, a willingness to learn about traditional ecological knowledges, and an openness to the belief in spirit guides as helpers. As a leader, medicine woman and educator, I believe she is *woman as land* as she embodies the Indigenous principles of holism, synergy, and interdependency. In this, she expects authenticity and reciprocity; it is as she lives.

Of Seneca and Strawberries and Porcupine Love – Re-emergence

When I first met Elder Stella Blackbird I experienced a welcoming, a love quilled within the moose hide folds of play, joy, deep compassion and focus. I knew this woman was a powerful healer and yet I knew nothing about her. What I found was a woman who had all the attributes of the *Kwakwu* (Cree word for porcupine, Lincoln, 1985) in a body that did not seem prickly at all. This meeting was a new life, a breath of crisp air, a flash of sun that brought me to a place of healing and light. Perhaps not the place I was before, but a better place, a place of meaning, a place of peace. In the late fall of 2010, a few years after meeting Stella Blackbird, I was driving in the parklands near Pike Lake, Saskatchewan and it was there I found *Kwakwu*, high in a tree. It was the first time she appeared to me in this way; and it was this appearing and the concurrent understanding of my re-emergence that prompted me to learn more about *Kwakwu*.

Re-emergence is a powerful place, and I found from days and weeks and months of black and grey come brilliant moments with filters of moss and seneca and amber light. As I began to contextualize an understanding of self-healing, I came to recognize how each of the *Sisters* journeyed on this path and how it is one and the same as their leadership journey. I understand this re-emergence as a context that implies you have come out of something you have entered, perhaps a travesty, a hardship, a place where,

undoubtedly, you should have not gone, to be seen and heard again, to be trusted with the leadership that has been granted to you.

The *Kwakwu* is known as the little carrier of the medicines; she is revered in Indigenous culture and her quills are found within their decorative symbolisms of strength, trust and faith (Blackbird, 2010). The quillwork of the Cree, Dene, Métis, Ojibwa, Lakota, Sioux, Blackfeet, Mohawk, and other Indigenous peoples can be found in the histories and contemporary storywork of each tribal group. Woven among countries throughout the globe, one who is looking can unearth engaging legends honouring *Kwakwu* and the ancient wisdoms of her peoples. In the past few years, both eastern and western health practitioners have come to recognize the energy found with the medicine of the porcupine, and although those in industry and agriculture sometimes consider her a pest, she is regaining her place among the sacred.

To me, *Kwakwu* symbolizes *Manâtcihiwewin* (Cree word for showing respect) and it encompasses four values, *Tapowakeythi tamowin* (truth), *Kisewatisowin* (kindness), *Asakiwin* (sharing/caring) and *Tapwiwin* (honesty) for a coming to self-healing, a loving of self, and a “walk in balance” (Michell, 2005). Understanding the persona of *Kwakwu* is understanding some of what Elder Stella Blackbird and the other women of *Sisters* are today. Like *Kwakwu*, they have been begged to listen - *nutoka moo* - and often, they step back from their situations to look forward, *Usa puyew usu wapiw*, just as the porcupine does (Lincoln, 1985). The recounts of their own histories, the respect for ancestral wisdom and traditional knowledge, and their persistent vision to move forward within a contemporary world is reflected in the *Storywork* of every one of the women in *Sisters*. The complexities of these women emerge as they engage in their

work by “reversing and suspending historical time, [and as they] re-enter that protective burrow of tradition looking out on the future” (Lincoln, 1985, p 127). Like *Kwakwu*, these women defend their territories in quiet and non-confrontational ways. However, when provoked, they will do everything in their power to protect themselves, their kinships and their territories. Joyful calmness, youthful thinking and open negotiation are among their strongest medicines of defense. Through cooperative and somewhat quiet interactions laced with humour, playfulness and humility, these women exhibit the traits of *Kwakwu*. They are fearless, confident and relaxed, and as they trust in their own abilities to protect themselves, they know others recognize their strengths.

As environmental racism splinters the land and its inhabitants, it divides and ripples, and the shards of neo-colonization it holds impacts a great number of young people. Their lives become shattered. Some carry wounds for a lifetime, many die and others simply continue to hurt themselves, their children, their parents and those closest to them. Blackbird, Watson and Cook-Searson have experienced suicide from the living side of this horror; as survivors who are mothers and sisters, they believe talking about this reality is a beginning step on the healing path. When they tell me their stories, I begin to clearly see how disengagement from homelands and tradition has impacted not only their families, but also generations of young people across their lands. Blackbird’s daughter, Watson’s stepdaughter and Cook-Searson’s sister lived in a place where this disconnect was foremost, a place where the frayed edges of mental illness permeated their souls, a place where there were no supports and safety nets, a place that continues to haunt and hurt those left behind.

In Canada, the statistics tell the story—Nunavut, northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba—are shown as the lands with the highest rates of youth suicide in the world. In Nunavut, suicide rates of young males are a staggering 28 times the national Canadian average (Native Village Youth and Education News, 2011). As difficult as this topic is, each of the women in *Sisters* recognizes the necessity of critical discussion. Like Watkins, they exhibit courage by displaying their own authenticities and by sharing their family stories about mental illness, suicide and disengagement:

“I just lost a loved one from suicide in May. It's a hard thing to accept in yourself, within your inner peace,” said Jennifer Watkins from the National Inuit Youth Council. “Suicide prevention is a very harsh topic to talk about and to live with, and we have to accept it because there is a lot of young people who are committing suicide.” (Native Village Youth and Education News, 2011, para 4).

As Watkins, tells me more about her stepdaughter, I put together the pieces of fragmentation and disconnection families and young people of the north experience. The poverty found in Inuit communities and a lack of mental health resources compound this issue. Tammy Cook-Searson, a woman who has personally experienced the isolation and distress of mental illness expresses her concerns about the young people and the demise of young men unable to find a place in their communities:

I always feel bad when I see a young man about 18 to 25 or 30 walking down town or just a young guy walking down because the young men had such an important role in our society, when they were hunters, trappers, they still are, because they have so much potential ... but then maybe they get frustrated and keep running into different obstacles. They want to do something. Then you

have literacy [levels] where people can't read or write. ...the land...they've lost the will of how to survive off the land.

She speaks of her sister, her own healing, western therapies and traditional medicines.

As a means to calm her inner turmoil and resolve inner conflict, she became dissociative.

Tammy examines what this disassociation meant for her:

At first it was mainly for my son and then later on it was other issues, because I was sexually abused as a little girl too. So in dealing with that, I'm not a victim any more...you become a survivor and pretty soon that's not even part of who you are ... but I still have a lot of work to do. The biggest thing is I had a lot of anxiety. I never even knew I had anxiety, until I found that I actually lived outside of my body. I was here, but I wasn't even feeling. I started noticing my own body, it was really neat. I told my therapist, because sometimes I would be sitting there and I'd twitch, she said, "oh, your body is discharging." I started noticing my nails and everything. And she said, "You are just starting to live inside your body." That is how I survived. I disassociated.

With sadness, Cook-Searson recognizes the dysfunction found with some members of the community and she acknowledges that much has to be done:

There is so much violence in our community. So much sexual abuse, it still continues to happen, but how do you control it and minimize it? So you know, you just know, you see the court systems that are still there, our people are filling up the jail system, and it has to do with alcohol, either alcohol or drugs. We do our best to protect the children, our youth and we try to provide programming for them, try to give them hope. But there is so much to be done.

In her own way she looks to Elders and both western and Indigenous healers to help her forge a new path, and to bring back a traditional healing process and a necessary wellness and treatment center for those she serves:

I talk to Elders and I learn from them because they have so much experience. I go berry picking with my grandma. My grandma is very patient. That's what I learned from my grandma, 'cause I'm always in a rush, always in a hurry, but my grandma will just be really, really patient. She would have one cigarette a night, that's all she ever had; she would sit on the floor and clear everything, have her ashtray there and have her one. That's all she would have. I learn [also] from the healers. Both my parents do medicine, so they heal people and they pick medicines. They know where to get it and how to mix it and stuff like that. I am always learning and I continue to learn from others.

The concern Marie Adam shows in her dark brown eyes and her raised brow lets me know she has deep fears for the Aboriginal women of Canada. She speaks of the travesty of missing and murdered women in the Fort McMurray area and she knows those in government and industry hide the rocketing reality of violence in this community. In a place where cocaine is easier to buy than pizza, rising incidences of substance abuse lead to increases in family violence, sexual abuse, HIV, AIDS and suicides. Families in the Fort McMurray, Fort MacKay and Fort Chip regions may well hold the Canadian record in disease counts, and even when one calculates of all the cancers, respiratory diseases, diabetes and HIV/AIDS stats and is horrified, this exercise seems benign when placed alongside the comparative, and growing list of missing and murdered women and men in northern Alberta:

... where I live I see a lot of young people on the street, that was just a block away. I would stop and I'd talk to them, near my home, where I live, 'cause I live downtown. And that's where I learned my respect, it doesn't matter who they are, if they are street girls, who they are, I always stop and talk to them, 'cause I know they're someone's daughter, someone's sister, someone's mother. Even just to say, "Hello, how are you?" But I would never stop and say you shouldn't be doing this and stuff like that you know. If they need help, they'll ask for it, when they're ready they'll ask for it. And a lot of them do not wish, do not wish be bothered about it, what they're doing, 'cause a lot them are ashamed.

Adam is a quiet woman, a woman who has faced her own demons throughout the years. Her childhood was filled with much sorrow, and as she and her mother grieved for her four sisters, she continued to face her reality with the brightest of adolescent faces. She knows the girls and women she meets on the street have suffered in the same way she has, through residential school trauma and patriarchal abuse. The 1952 *Life* photo of Marie Adam shows a different picture, however, as this iconic photo shows an exuberant young 17-year-old Dene woman on the verge of adventure. The photo speaks volumes about the brilliance, the perseverance, and the liveliness of Marie Adam; to me it shows her like *Kwakwu*, fearless in her own skin, a long living survivalist who hears her people. Adam has lived through her own hurt and that of her family, and yet she continues to support and pray for others in need. She reflects on her own healing:

Well I learned a lot from my Blackfoot friends, about the Sundance. That's where I found my inner peace that I needed to find for a long time. That was learning from them and that's how I started healing. So as I got older, I'm not as angry

like I used to be about different things you know. There were things in my lifetime that I was very angry about.

For Marie Adam, there are no ‘wrong’ questions, she prays for all and takes the time to speak to those who want to learn, women, young children, HIV/AIDS patients, college students, band members, scientists and yes, even oil executives. As a residential school survivor, an abused spouse, a single parent and a woman who sees the realities of racism and sexism on her front street, and in the bakeries, bars and department stores of Fort McMurray, she believes there has to be another way to come to a place of sustainability. A place yet undiscovered that provides access to an economy, in a healthy and peaceful way, in a way that respects Indigenous women, and all women. In a way that understands *woman as land*.

In response to the impact of environmental racism, and like the barbs that shoot out and expand from the 30,000 quills of *Kwakwu*, the words of the women in this study are critical to their wellness and that of their kinships. When women engage in healing, they do so in a multitude of ways and one of those ways of course, is in the re-telling, the re-direction of a story of hurt (Mel-Madrona, 2007). The women of *Sisters* remain on the Red Road, the good path; they are on a healing journey, each looking to different sources of light. Sometimes that light is found in their continued dialogues with insiders, outsiders, settlers, and learners. Sometimes it is with children and members of their own families; sometimes it is with bureaucrats and gamblers and street workers. The words they choose can enlighten, at other times they sting, and so they must, in order to let the oppressor know that *Kwakwu* is hearing and watching.

A few years past, Ila Bussidor's main intent in obtaining a job as a camp cook was to assess the climate of DeBeers Mining. She did this by observing the conversations of other workers and by educating the few young workers who invited her to their conversations. As she worked along side these people at an exploration camp outside of Churchill, Manitoba, she clarified her vision and gave herself new courage in this reemergence as a strong Denesuline voice:

You know, a community like Tadoule Lake, the history that I'm talking about and how people have suffered, you know greatly, and how so many lives were lost needlessly, and for somebody making a decision for us. Without our land, we are a broken people. We should not let diamond mines or any other mining companies come on to our traditional territory and say they see a struggling community that needs so much healing, so much development, Tadoule Lake, and then right outside of this, the potential for diamonds, for gold, and they know that. They come to us and they say, "Here, we'll provide jobs and we'll provide some kinds of resources if you let us do this and then you become partners". But then what they're going [to do in] extracting is not going to be there forever. They'll deplete whatever's there and then they'll leave after. There's damage, environmental damage to the water, to the animals from the land, and that kind of thing. I find it sad that some people are ready and willing to say, "ok, we need jobs, we need to build better homes, maybe we need a new bus for the school; let's go for it so we can have that". I say "No". As long as I'm alive and breathing, I will continue to say what I believe. The land is ours, we cannot allow somebody to dig big giant holes all over the place and damage what has been there forever.

She comments on her impressions of the executives of DeBeers Mining and following that, the young geology students she interacts with by offering them the gift of her book,

Night Spirits:

I think that it's like they, they see the people struggling, no jobs, no economy, nothing, just welfare economy, and then they come with money and they say "here", and of course some people are going to say "ok." I had an opportunity to just look at who these people are, as a cook's helper. I got books from the University here and I gave them each a copy of my book, all these students and you know, they're all from south, from Ontario and they knew nothing about the people, that we were here first. So one guy comes up to me and he says, "I couldn't put this book down because it happened in this town" and I said, "That's the reason I gave it to you guys and gals." I think they were shocked; that it actually it happened you know ...something like that happened in that town. But a lot are clued out about ... Aboriginal people... like a lot of people, they think that... well we are stigmatized ok ... you know in Thompson, or even here in Winnipeg, you go down main street. That scene hasn't changed, you know from that bridge from the Sutherland Hotel and Yale, that way for a stretch, there, probably up to Redwood. That's been the same all the time as far as I can remember, and Thompson too. Main Street, you see the people from northern communities on the streets, you see that ... it goes on like that. So whenever I get an opportunity to speak in public, I try to say that there are beautiful, intelligent Aboriginal people out there.

Like Bussidor, Joan Scottie embodies concern and worry, but that does not diminish her voice or her courage. In 2007, she presented these words to the Nunavut Tunngavik

Incorporated (NTI) Lands Policy Advisory Committee, as she believes NTI has adapted a pro-uranium stance:

What does small “foot-print” mean in my language? You are giving us a lot of information about uranium mining and exploration and we are just listening. We are not allowed to say anything about it. Are you here to get input from us about the uranium policy?

More than five years later, she continued to critique the work of NTI and as she speaks about the uranium companies incessant campaigning, those from around the world heed her words:

Still, Scottie says the companies pursuing uranium projects in the region are pushing people to support uranium mining. She points directly to Areva’s Baker Lake office, from which the company liaises with the region. “They’re really trying to win people’s minds,” she says. “They’re taking elders to their traditional grounds in helicopters.” She admits she feels outmatched by the companies, given all their resources. “They have lots of money, lots of meetings and they’re very strong,” she says. I am concerned about the policy; the biggest concern is that we want to protect our hunting grounds from all the exploration and mining. We are concerned about wildlife, caribou, fish and birds. We want to ensure that we are consulted. We are also concerned about helicopters and archaeological sites.” (McGinnis 2012).

Today, armed with an awareness of the great fragmentation of views in Baker Lake around the uranium development, Scottie continues to defend her position. As one who has re-emerged, she carries the same energy she had 30 years ago when she first spoke in

Salzburg. Her presentations are situated in Canada now, but journalists and scientists from around the world come to Baker Lake to find her and to speak with her. Today, as she broadens her vision of *woman as land*, by working with students, academics, journalists and scientists in the protection of her people, her lands and the caribou, she speaks of the love that is required to sustain oneself and others:

You have to be in love with people; you have to be able to listen, be involved. I am lucky that I work in an organization that looks after our hunters, our hunters' membership.

Like *Kwakwu*, these women are of the land; they need the land to ensure their health and the wellness of their peoples. Stella Blackbird's life, defined by her *storywork* and healing actions, shows the significance of self-healing. The work she did prior to leading others in a journey of wellness came through many years of conscientization – critical reflection and critical action, and it seems, critical prayer. She tells me she has been on a healing journey for more than 30 years and it was the time she spent at a personal development and healing program at Alkali Lake, British Columbia, where she learned to grow through ceremony and recognized her place in *woman as land*:

“One morning I woke up and realized I was part of this, the creation,” says Stella.

“I am related to the grass, the trees, the sky, the water. This was my awakening and that's when things began to change.” (Status of Women Manitoba, 2008, p.3).

During the past 25 years as a Resident Elder for both associations and schools, she has created healing spaces for children, young people, women and men. She has received visions, picked and made medicines, and led ceremonies to heal the hearts and bodies of many. Like *Kwakwu*, her stamina, quiet persistence, playfulness and humour keep her

going when she has encountered dark days. She has lost family, children and grandchildren, to cancer and other diseases, and to suicide and murder. Yet she is, without a doubt, one of the most peaceful and loving women I know, and each day she continues to love and to give. Her early days were gifted to me in this story:

And finally going through a healing, lots of healing, I found my name. I was given a name by the spirits. My name is Red Eagle Woman. My name Stella is in Latin, but actually means star. And so my colours are here, blue, yellow, white, red, and I have black for the turtle and Turtle is my clan.

Well after I did a lot of healing work on my past, I started to volunteer with Child and Family and to help out when there was planning on gatherings and because my children [were] getting grown up, and most of them left the home. I started volunteering on committees and that one time I became Chairperson of Keeseekoowenin Child and Family Services. We used to plan summer camps for the children and we couldn't get anyone to drive the bus for us, or drivers, so I got myself a license so that I could drive a school bus and just to go short trips to Clear Lake to take the children. And we would have them up there for maybe a week and then I would bring the children home. And this one time I was so saddened, after dropping all the children off. Some parents weren't home, some were under the influence, and some of the children told me they didn't have any food at home. And when I got home I was just, I went to my bedroom, there was nobody at home. I was so overwhelmed with what I was hearing. So I went to my bedroom and I knelt by my bed and I started to pray. I started to cry, "Why is this happening?" So, I got up. I felt relief ... that I could do something, I could

get more involved. I could make a difference. I knew the children trusted me. So, that's how I began. I began ... if they're having a get together, I volunteered to cook. And I start taking workshops to educate myself in other ways. Through my years of experience and learning the Child Welfare Act and being on the committee ... [I knew if] the government had made changes that they would train the Aboriginals to have their own agencies; the reserves and our head office was in Dauphin. So, they needed to train the existing workers, they had to take university courses. They needed workers. I was one of them that was, one worker that was hired as a CFS worker. And we had crash courses and while these were being trained to get their degrees. I think I worked two years for that. And in the meantime Audrey was already trained. She was the PRS worker. We always worked together and we made lots of changes like making presentations to the committees and they would present it to the Directors. So, one of them was, instead of removing the children that we would put placement homemakers in the homes and teach the mothers, the parents, instead of removing them. And we would sit with the parents and ask them what they would want, our help, as workers instead of us telling them, you must do this or that.

Stella spends vast amounts of time travelling to and supporting others in need, through leading ceremonies and gifting natural medicines in Winnipeg, and throughout the prairies, the eastern boreal and the north. The learning space, the healing space, in which she feels most comfortable is situated on her adopted homeland in *Treaty 2* Territory of Keeseekoowenin First Nation; it is here she is *woman as land*. On the traditional lands of the Keeseekoowenin First Nation, she receives many of her visions

when in ceremony. The *Medicine Eagle Healing and Retreat Center* is where all of her is focused on a critical hope, that of intergenerational healing and learning. Both she and Elder Audrey Bone believe teachings are key to helping Aboriginal peoples become whole, become free. Intergenerational love, ceremonial knowledge and traditional skills must be transferred to youth, to men and to women. She has wise words for those learning about the path to spirit, and on the openness one requires in accepting that an understanding of Indigenous spirituality comes in a multitude of ways, and at different times:

“Because of the kindness of the Elders who have come into my life, I have learned that it doesn’t have to be complicated,” she says. “I used to worry. I didn’t want to insult the Creator. A teacher said the Creator will accept you as you learn. There are always people on our path to teach me.” (Status of Women Manitoba, 2008, p.3).

As she continues the story with her talking stick, she tells me how she uses it with children and adults alike:

And this is my life today: I found my culture, my colours. I put this here for the medicine wheel and the protection of the sun. I have a little bundle, that represents my bundle, my pipe, the things that keep me strong today, faith and this is for ceremonies, a reminder of nature. And today I live my life with being outdoors and I have a bunch of animals. I love sitting out there in the forest, looking way late at night, watching the stars and hearing the animals, listening to the animals. I have a peaceful life now, when I found myself through my healing, and that’s my talking stick.

Like *Kwakwu*, Stella sits in the forest; it is her place of comfort, love and peace. It is this place in nature that gives her sustainability and steadiness, and it is this place, which erases fear. She may appear relaxed and calm, yet, she hears her peoples' cries and she sees the vast amount of social change that has to occur to unearth the injustices of ecological destruction and neo-colonialism. She clearly recognizes the fallouts of environmental racism but her re-emergence throughout these 30 years of ceremony, medicine work and spiritual teachings continues to grow love in a peaceful and confident way. As we sit in the sun in the mists of *Wasagaming* (Ojibway word for Clear Lake) near her camp and I take in the smells of a late summer, she tells me her work is not done here on Turtle Island. I watch her as she digs deep for the seneca root she honours and as I follow her smile, I pick my first wild strawberry as medicine. Unannounced to me, the strawberry signifies women's knowledge as found within the ancient knowledge systems of Anishinaabe, and the traditional peoples of Keeseekoowenin First Nation (Gehl, 2014). After learning this, I reaffirmed my belief in the significant mystery of Stella Blackbird and I give thanks to *Manitou*.

Dancing on the Ice – Re-vitalization

Revitalization speaks to the leadership of the women in *Sisters*. It lends credence to whom they are and how they continue to bring prominence to the work they do in addressing injustices and environmental racism, and in the giving of new life to their kinships. Each one of these women can be compared to the *Idthen* (Dene word for Caribou) or the *Tuktu* (Inuktitut for caribou) in that they often identify as one and the same. The Barren Ground Caribou and the Woodlands Boreal Caribou, the spirit guides of many Artic and sub-Artic peoples, are the lifebloods of the Dene and the Inuit, and

they sustain the Cree, the Innu and Métis peoples in northern Canada. Most Canadians have little knowledge of the caribou and as they struggle to recognize the imprint of this dignified animal found on our 25-cent currency, many have difficulty linking the intricacies of caribou life to human life. Like the Inuit, Dene, Cree and Métis women in this study, the caribou teach others about adaptability, caution, endurance, strength, tenacity and perseverance. Ancient tradition tells us the *Idthen* will show you how to take on roles of duality, to know when it is right to exhibit dominance and when it is time to engage in the kinds of subtleties that make concrete differences in cooperative mergers or contested conversations. The caribou epitomizes a move forward and serves as a platform for understanding the strength in the collective. It has been said the *Idthen* is a symbol of spiritual transition to a higher understanding of life; it guides humanity through a relationality with all life forms and spirits (Boyden, 2010; StarStuffs, 2014). Like *Idthen*, the women of *Sisters* are guided by ancestral knowings and their actions are embodied through blood memory. These women have encountered much distress yet like the *Idthen*, they continue to “dance on the ice”.

Numerous examples of the interconnections of caribou and Indigenous peoples have been written about, however, I believe that one has to personalize and see these connections for one’s self to internalize this understanding. In learning about Indigenous wellness and identity, in both cultural and spiritual realms, one is offered a glimpse of how to understand the peoples, and their connections to other living entities including their traditional lands by being a part of the land and the peoples. My practical knowledge of the *Idthen* came when I attended the *Keepers of the Water* gathering during the summer of 2010 in Wollaston, Saskatchewan, and within the homelands of the

Hatchet Lake Denesuline Nation. Never have I seen a group of people honour an animal in this way. As I learned more about the caribou as sustainer, I, along with the other delegates, was presented this food sustenance in a multiplicity of ways. This conference gathering defined the spiritual and cultural capital of the caribou as it showed the significance of food sovereignty and land health as one in wellness. It was like no other gathering I had witnessed. Ceremony, dancing, drumming and language are intricately tied to the honouring of the *Idthen* and to the preservation of land and waters. Metaphorically, the *Idthen* is sustenance, she is ancestor and she is neighbour (Suzuki, 2013).

Collectively, these women embody regeneration, spirituality and comradeship as they go about their work. All these women take on the characteristics of the *Idthen*, however, the Dene and Inuit women in *Sisters* best reflect upon what the *Idthen* means to Indigenous peoples. Ila Bussidor muses, “we would never have survived without the caribou, just like other Aboriginal people from the south, they relied on the buffalo”. In a similar fashion to Winona LaDuke’s teachings of the buffalo (1999), Marie Adam, Ila Bussidor, Joan Scottie and Jennifer Watkins recognize the caribou, the *Idthen*, as ‘keeper’ of a vast northern biosphere, a brother of the peoples, and a sustainer of the Inuit and Dene, as well as the Innu, Cree and Métis peoples of the north.

Like Scottie, Adam, Watkins and Bussidor do, those from the David Suzuki Foundation echo concerns about the protection of the caribou, its role in sustaining the biosphere, and the need to address habitat fragmentation and climate change:

The biggest threat to caribou’s survival is habitat fragmentation, which increases access by predators. Scientists consider caribou as bellwethers of the health of the

Boreal forest, which also cleanses our air and water, and stores vast amounts of carbon within its soils, moderating climate change (CPAWS & Suzuki, 2013, para 7).

For Scottie, “dancing on the ice” with the caribou is something that has captured her soul. As I learned more about the life work of Joan Scottie, I found my friend Heike Fink, a German woman who now lives in Prudhomme, Saskatchewan, helped organize the 1992 World Uranium Hearing in Salzburg, Austria. As a young anti-nuclear activist, Heike had met Joan many years ago on European lands where Scottie was one among two hundred Indigenous peoples who came to present stories of resistance and concern to Indigenous and non- Indigenous peoples alike. Four years before that international meeting, Joan Scottie formed the *Baker Lake Concerned Citizens' Committee* and began working with Dr. Rosalie Bertell, Dr. Gordon Edwards and Dr. Jim Harding, renowned anti-nuclear scientists and activists. Her vast experience began in the early 1970's:

In the early 70s the settlement councils were created; they later became the hamlet councils. It was the first time that Inuit participated in local nominations and elections. Even though I was pretty young, I was elected to the Baker Lake council for its first three years and sat on various community committees. Then, in the late 70s, the Inuit hunters of Baker Lake became concerned and angry about all the industrial exploration activities taking place where they hunted. They went to court for an injunction against the issuing of federal exploration permits for their traditional hunting grounds. I worked with some consultants from Winnipeg to interview fifty hunters and fishermen from our community about where the important hunting grounds and fishing places were and also the traditional

migration routes, water-crossings and which of them should be protected. I learned a lot from that experience.

After that I worked for the federal Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) as a sub-district manager enforcing land use regulations and the caribou protection measures that were the result of those interviews. The hunters had asked that during the caribou calving or post-calving water crossings, the major migration routes be protected. From DIAND's sub-district office in Baker Lake, I flew all over the Kivalliq to enforce regulations in the mining industry. I did land-use inspections and made sure that when industry was flying around doing diamond drilling, they didn't fly below certain attitudes outlined in the regulations. I enjoyed that work, because I understood the hunters' concerns. If I'm concerned about the environment today, it's not just from my heart, it's because I learned something from those fifty hunters I interviewed.

Scottie continues to hold an overwhelming concern for the trappers, the hunters, the Elders who do not speak English, and the youth who are manipulated by mining companies with propaganda promises of wealth and trinkets. The distribution of prizes, things like hats and jackets, iPods and TVs, accompany every motivational school speech that the industry's best bring to elementary and secondary students. She is motivated to protect the lives of young people as she recognizes the neo-colonial and global effects of development as it fractures her community through the realities of racism, poverty, and abuse.

While escalations of alcoholism and drug use, skyrocketing suicides, and family and school disengagements continue to rise in the Baker Lake and Nunavut populations,

she does not give up hope for change. She reminds me of her mother's words describing her eternal optimism and the undying tenacity of her father's bloodline. In his way, she retains hope for a positive change in the bureaucracy of climate negotiations and a change in the self-determined actions of youth. Her understanding of *woman as land* is one and the same as her identity as an Inuk, and her connection to the *Tuktu* (caribou), the lifeblood of her identity, remains intact. She believes in the strength of women and recognizes their significant roles as team builders.

As an Inuit woman and elder, she sees the colonial actions of the state and its law enforcers as a joined entity, one that has caused great upheaval in the Arctic. As she watches the government of Nunavut and many other political entities in the Arctic strut their role of "big brother" by ensuring mining companies are given wide berths to protect their resource interests, and as the co-opting of government allows industry privilege and uranium exploration escalates in the Ceylon Basin, she does worry about the spiritual and emotional balance of her peoples and the sustainability of the inland Inuit. She sees the *Tuktu* (Inuktitut for caribou) as one and the same as the Inuit, and she is alarmed by the detrimental impact of industry on her beloved *Tuktu* and her traditional and once pristine lands and waters. She knows without the *Tuktu* her people will not survive:

Well, we are very connected to the land, to the caribou hunting habitat, you know, where the caribou live. It is very much part of our life, who we are. It's like it's our identity, our spirit. And when you are out there, you get something from the land. When you get paid you use some of that money to go out to the land to go hunting. When camping, we spend a lot of time on the land doing traditional stuff. It's a very big part of us. Where we live now in the community, it's like

being put in one place, and it is easy for the government to control us in one place. Put us in a house, give us welfare so we won't be out there wandering all over the place; this is how they try to control us.

As the vice-chair of 'Makita' (Makitagunarningit Nunavummiut), the only environmental non-governmental agency (NGO) in the artic, Scottie has appealed to the *United Nations Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* to slow the incessant public relations campaign of AREVA and the development of the first of many impending uranium mines. "We are the Caribou people," she says, as she explains how life with the *Tuktu* is self-sustaining, culturally, biologically, ecologically, spiritually and economically. She talks about the Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board and its role in managing the two caribou herds for the preservation of Aboriginal peoples in Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and Manitoba —the Inuit, Dene, Cree and Métis:

They are our lives; and the caribou board is to protect those herds. There's a caribou board called *The Beverly and Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board* (BQCMB). It's managed [by eight to ten community members and five government representatives from Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan and Manitoba] and they have said how much money is spent, or when they put a dollar on caribou. You know it's a big money thing. You don't see that. If you had to buy meat from a Northern Store, you know it costs of lot of money. So a lot of people don't see that, they don't see how going out hunting out there ... it's a big part of our economy. It keeps us alive. It's our subsistence and it's part of our life. We have nothing to gain and everything to lose if

uranium mining goes ahead. If anything happened to the caribou we would have nothing but welfare. So our clean environment means everything to us.

Joan Scottie recently formed a new coalition of supporters and has taken to social media in an attempt to rein AREVA in. She continues to receive positive energy from Elders, trappers, hunters and her own family, and she speaks with pride about her 17-year-old granddaughter who is currently in CEJEP and planning to attend Carleton University to undertake a degree in environmental studies. As Scottie knows, the sustenance of an Inuit way of life is being chipped away by those in industry, here in Canada and across the globe, and she believes in reaching out to young people as they are key players in the balance required to protect ecological wellness. Scottie does not sit on her laurels; rather she mentors women similar to Jennifer Watkins.

In a similar pattern to Joan Scottie, Jennifer Watkins learns from mentors, advocates and healers as she visits Elders and youth throughout Canada and spends copious amounts of time in meetings with bureaucrats much older and in some ways, more politically seasoned and suave than her. Regardless, she is fearless in her continued belief in the correlation of land wellness and that of its peoples:

I will try to argue or put my opinion on the table with facts to back me up. And I always remind people: “We were elected by our voters so that we can represent them.” I always stress the importance of why Inuit [values] should be [our] priority. It’s our homeland; we are not moving from here. We live here, we live off the land, and we depend on the migration of the animals. We must remind ourselves of that when we are faced with making decisions that might affect our people, our land, and our traditions.

Marie Adam's re-vitalization has come from her granddaughters, her daughters, her mother and her grandmother. In those years after her move "home", years after her own healing and during those mothering years, she had time to grow. As blood memories flood her psyche, she only now shares how *woman as land*, a woman's lineage, may lead to the sacred role of the protection of the feminine and the protection of the water: "That's what I tell my girls, we are the keepers of the women," as she shares with me the lineage of six generations of women and how it took 38 years for another boy, her first great grandchild, to come along. She ponders who will be born of the seventh generation and what role that child will take, because in Indigenous kinships, each child, young person, woman and man has a role. Mostly she wonders how the children of today and tomorrow will learn about the connection of her peoples with the land and the water:

Well you see, I ... many times like when my grandmother taught me how to set rabbit snares, stuff like that, I learned from her. Then I think of my great grandchildren and my grandchildren, the ones that are grown up now, we never had a chance. I never had a chance to teach them these things. Cause we were out in Fort MacMurray.

That's how I got involved with the water. I remember I was being interviewed from Norway and another time from Paris and another time from South America, I think. Yeah, I was interviewed by [people] from different countries. I said to these people back home, [I wonder if they will] be speaking English here. It was kind of funny. And then the people that came from Paris, there was a woman and a couple of guys. I took them down to this little place in the bush in November; there were rabbit tracks there. Some of them had never

seen snow. So anyway I showed them the rabbit tracks and here there was one in a little trap...

So, that is how. I really love the water. From what I see, and I was with my nephew [who has] a tape of my mother, it came from my mother in the early seventies. She was talking about the water, the difference in water, the color. And she said the color of the water had changed, was changing. And I start thinking, I live here by the river, and it's always muddy, it is never clear. I grew up where the lake is, where you could see right to the bottom. And I found, I start thinking about how much water is being used in the sand around, much of our water is polluted, our land is polluted. We don't even see whiskey jacks, you know or Canada jays. I have never seen any for years. It is sad, and we have deer, they live right in McMurray. I have a feeder in the back of the building where I live, and they come and eat all my birdseed. But still, you know there is so much change, so much change in that I see. And that's when I got involved with *Keepers of the Water* and I started speaking out about that, and I started speaking out at the school.

While Adam's presence is felt around the globe, her physical work remains within the Dene communities she loves. Yvonne Vizina, however, carries her being, her heart and her intellect to far away places, those of the traditional lands of our global Indigenous neighbours. She shares this story:

In 2011, I was honoured to participate in a joint discussion hosted in Panama between scientists, international organizations, and Indigenous Peoples. For a week we lived together on a remote island, talking, exchanging insights and

knowledge and considering how Indigenous Peoples and the science communities can better work together. The host organization from Sweden prepared a final report detailing our collective and individual contributions and it is available to the public. It is my hope that all the participants there were changed in a good way because of our new relationships with each other. Also, designated people reported to the newly emerging Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which will assist the work associated with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. IPBES is something like the independent Climate Change Panel (which recently won a Nobel Prize for their important work), but aside from the obvious topic difference, the IPBES has welcomed and is encouraging the contribution of Indigenous knowledges in their work regarding biodiversity. So, this is a great opportunity, among others, that exists at the international level, but we have real difficulty domestically with having sufficient, or any, resources to participate in these processes because we are reliant upon federal sources which may or may not be provided.

As we discuss the recent downsizing the Canadian government has imposed on scientists and science programs, I ask what drives her to continue this work. As a lifelong learner and educator, she retains a sense of hope. I believe her revitalization comes from the children, Elders, scientists and policy makers that work together in a reclamation of land and health:

So, throughout my life, I have tried to choose a path that will allow me to participate in contributing to the resolution of environmental issues. I don't feel particularly compelled to become any kind of environmental activist, although

that time may yet be coming for me. I have applied my life to improving my own learning, sharing what I know, contributing to my own Métis community, and working collaboratively with other Indigenous Peoples in Canada and elsewhere in the world. I realize that one day the Elders that I rely on will be gone, and there will be younger people who are relying on me. So, I try to live in a way that I continue to learn and prepare myself for that time. I don't think it is possible for Aboriginal Peoples to bear the responsibility for helping the Earth recover from the environmental destruction that is happening on a planetary scale.

Like Vizina, Alfred (1999) believes Indigenous peoples must not be the ones to bear responsibility for the brunt of environmental displacement and destruction, rather there should be a space created for ongoing dialogue and dispute resolution between and with Indigenous peoples and all others. He believes cooperation is often hindered by political, racial and legal differences between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous communities alike, and in many instances, governments are the culprits in this prolonged divisiveness. He believes

the time has come to recognize our mutual dependency; to realize that Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities are permanent features of our political and social landscape; to embrace the notion of respectful cooperation on equal terms; and to apply peace-making principles on which were based both the many great pre-contact North American confederacies and later alliances that allowed European societies to establish themselves and flourish on this continent (Alfred, 1999, p.53)

It is this belief in a mutual dependency and the need for equal and respectful peace-making cohesions that all the *Sisters* have testified to as a driving force for hope. The merging of Indigenous traditionalism and contemporary western knowledges and alliances may lead to a collective solution building process for all *Earth's* inhabitants.

Chapter VI – The Leadership of Kanawayhitowin

Power is in the earth, it is in your relationship to the earth.

Winona LaDuke

Woman as Healer

Kanawayhitowin is the Cree word encompassing “a principle of care” and thus it implies protection, love and understanding. Essentially, it means we are responsible to provide care for each other and for each other’s spirits. Not only does it exist as the foundational methodology used in this study, it holds such significance, I have adapted it to define the leadership constitution the women of *Sisters* embody. This spirit that the women of *Sisters* protect is embodied in their relationships with traditional lands and all *Earth* matters they encounter. Their embodiment and love of this natural law, *Kanawayhitowin*, gifts them powers to lead and to heal, not only themselves, but also others they encounter. As they look to unearth the problems that are correlated with environmental racism and find solutions to kinship wellness, each adheres to this principle of care. Each and every person in a kinship has a role to play in that care, and within this principle, each is responsible to acknowledge and protect the sacredness of life.

Cook-Searson mentions this collective role significance to every reporter she converses with as it is a critical reality within her embodiment, her Cree worldview and her kinship offering of leadership. For her, each role and every person carries an equality of value within the spiritual context of interdependence and Indigeneity: “You had to help a lot. Everyone had a role, whether it was portaging the boat, berry picking, collecting wood or babysitting,” (Warwick, 2010, para 4). “Today when I go to the trap

line, everyone has a role, there are no iPod's and headsets, everyone has to pitch in," (Cook-Searson, personal conversation, April, 2014). The women in *Sisters* hold roles of equality among their kinships, and thus, when they engage in a multitude of actions in the search for wellness, it is with the knowledge that they are interdependent with all living beings and in synergy with the needs and actions of others. The understandings of interdependence, relationality and holism are embedded within their blood memories and as such are infused in the healing actions each *Sister* uses to reach out to youth, others within their kinships, and those from neighbouring communities and nations.

In the advancement of *Kanawayhitowin* as leadership, I draw from the scholarship of Vine Deloria Jr. and Taiaiake Alfred (1999) in their understanding of Indigenous leadership and Indigenous intellectualization that of which gives these *Sisters* empowerment:

In traditional Indigenous cultures, access to power is gained through balancing the diverse aspects of our being, harmonization with the natural forces that exist outside us, respect for the integrity of others and the diverse forms of power, and knowledge of ritual (Alfred, 1999, p.52).

Bothe Deloria Jr. and Alfred (1999) speak to the necessity of merging traditional knowings and contemporary realities to assist youth, and the seven generations before us. They speak of the need to protect traditionalism, that which is honoured through blood memory, ancestral teachings and spiritual knowings. The revitalization of Indigenous languages and the understanding of oral history as the root of this knowledge is noted: "We must add our voices to the narrative that is history, translate our understandings of

history and justice, and bring the power of our wisdom to bear on the relationships we have with others.” (Alfred, 1999, p.142).

In addition, Alfred (1999) advances a structural reform of Indigenous governance, a re-integration of Indigenous languages, and an expansion of Indigenous land bases to gain economic self-sufficiency, all within a newly created nation-to-nation relationship with Canada. He indicates that although Indigenous “intelligentsia” (1999, p.143) may appear elitist and counterintuitive, it is, in fact, essential to decolonization and self-determination, a critical and more important process than that of advancing sovereignty based on western knowings. As he believes current sovereignty understandings are rooted in “an adversarial and coercive Western notion of power” (Alfred, 1999, p. 143), he advances a traditional and collective knowing as one of preference; it is my belief this knowing must be grounded in that of the feminine. He says this:

The time has come for people who are from some place Indian to take back the discourse on Indians. There is nothing wrong with valuing traditional knowledge. A real Indian intellectual is proud of our traditions and is willing to take a risk in defending our principles (1999, p. 143).

Through this notion, it seems, it is in the balancing of diversity, the respecting of the natural and the spirit world, and the knowing of tradition and ceremony that one begins to heal. It is through these means that a courageous feminine leadership works to define *woman as healer*.

Of Eco-Feminism and Indigenous Traditionalism

Eco-feminist theory and similar notions have not always supported the rights of Indigenous women, however, in the past few decades there have been a number of

scholars and activists giving voice to and honouring ‘everyday’ Indigenous women and their epistemologies. Eco-feminism, first coined by Francoise d’Eaubonne in 1974, is a broad category of feminism that gives attention to the domination of women, and other ‘marginalized’ humans, as well as the domination of nature and all *Earth* matters. Simultaneously, it gives space for the potential of women to bring about an ecological change or revolution. She and Rosemary Radford Ruether (1975) are, in a sense, the grandmothers of this movement known as ecofeminism. Theorists often argue the feminine, associated with emotion, body and nature, has historically been seen as inferior through the dualisms of reason/emotion, mind/body, human/nature, and man/woman dichotomies (Gray, 1981; Warren, K. 1990, 1987). Simultaneously, they advance, that it is indeed, the feminine that has the greatest potential for solving earth problems and sustaining life. Ruether (1975) called for a unification of feminists and ecologists in her view of a societal transformation built on interdependence and harmony: “Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination” (Ruether, 1975, p. 204).

Although the women in *Sisters*, and several others I have made reference to in this work, have not identified themselves as eco-feminists, they hold characteristics of this category as they have engaged in grassroots activism, political maneuvering, and in some cases, peaceful public resistance against western, patriarchal dominance while addressing a multitude of post-colonial issues impacting the health and welfare of their kinships and their lands. Additionally, all of these *Sisters* believe in the power of spirituality and in knowing a higher power leads them in an earth-rooted sensibility:

Ecofeminism is a movement with an implicit and sometimes explicit spiritual base To say that ecofeminism is a spiritual movement, in an earth-rooted sense, means that it encompasses a dimension that profoundly challenges our ordinary sense of value, that counters the root stores of our culture and tries to shift them (Starhawk, 1989, p.174).

While addressing issues of health and wellness, the *Sisters* have tackled relocations, residential school fallout, and a range of industrial projects impacting and destroying traditional lands, cultures and spirits. As I think of the work of Vandana Shiva, I see the women of *Sisters*. As a physicist, author, philosopher, environmental activist and eco-feminist, Vandana Shiva's *Earthwork* closely resembles the knowings and actions of the *Sisters*. The collective resistances of these women emulate Shiva's work, in that their Indigeneity, along with Shiva's, preserves ancient Indigenous knowledges critical for ecological healing and health. The ecological impairments in which nuclear, hydro, forestry, mining, tourism, and agricultural developments have all played a hand in, have affected the biodiversity of *Earth* and the lives of Indigenous peoples. The women of *Sisters*, and the collectives of others who learn from them and advance their knowledges, are today exposing these infractions.

Although Shiva spends much of her time in her homeland of India, Canadians know her as activist, advocate and intellectual, and as a woman who understands quantum physics and the energies of *Earth* as one and the same. She has represented *Nature* at international meetings with the World Bank and as founding member of the *International Forum on Globalization* she leads informal networks of researchers, folk peoples and students as they learn more about the need to protect biodiversity. Under her

leadership, the world is beginning to see how the protection of Indigenous intellectual property and biodiversity wellness are connected. She has written hundreds of books and articles impacting the ecologies of women and she continues to write on foundational topics such as eco-knowledges and bio piracy. She does this while leading international campaigns on food security and other biodiversity issues. Like Shiva, the women of *Sisters* are multi-taskers. They defend biological and cultural diversity by protecting their waters, the boreal forest, the Arctic tundra, the grasslands, the seeds, and the millions of other species, including the human specie, that live within these biospheres. In this *Earthwork*, Shiva and the women of *Sisters* protect the bodily, spiritual and cultural health of all that lives around them. It seems these women, through their ongoing leadership and land living, are a part of an eco-revolution.

The idea of merging eco-feminism and Indigenous traditionalism became most clear to me when meeting Elder Marie Adam. It was she who drew my attention to the concept of *woman as land, children as water* and how it shall be shown that women are the chosen ones, and it is they who will lead in this ecological revolution. By exploring all the women's stories, I have come to understand that each, in a distinct way, is an eco-feminist and each of these has "soft power" (Vizina, 2013, personal conversation).

Yvonne Vizina has the following to say about the future of the ecological revolution and the role of women:

I think, as an Aboriginal woman, real leadership to me means helping others to become leaders in whatever capacity their lives hold for them. There are many kinds of leaders, and I think some of the common factors in leadership are courage, kindness, and wisdom. I learned about 'soft power' from another

woman many years ago. She taught me that one does not have to be loud or confrontational to be powerful. Women's strength, she said, is different from what the public often identifies as powerful. Women's strength is found in dignity, resistance in the face of oppression and the courage to carry out what you believe to be right without harming other people. At times when I get angry about something, I remember her teachings. It helps to remind me that at those times, I am not powerful; just angry and ineffective in whatever I am doing.

And I'm not a political activist, I don't go out and march or carry signs or do those kinds of things but I think for many, many years I've done my part with activism in the way that I could, in my profession, in my choices of careers and employment. And I don't like to be in the limelight. I like to be behind the scenes and helping or shaping, working together with other people.

Reclaiming Space for Indigenous Women

It has long been noted that women generally make up the vast majority of peaceful activists and organizers in grassroots movements, such as those movements opposing activities which project environmental ills upon Indigenous peoples, peoples of colour and others living in poverty. When I look to my own activism, that of saving green space in my summer community of Denare Beach and organizing a march to honour missing and murdered Indigenous women, it was here I recognized that, indeed, women can and do make a considerable difference. It has not always been easy to claim space for women's voices and this may be especially true for Indigenous women's voices. Ila Bussidor and Tammy Cook-Searson speak of the patriarchal resistance and the ingrained colonialism they faced as the first women chiefs in their territories. The

vigilance required to stay strong was with them at the start of their public leaderships and it follows them on their current pathways. Cook-Searson speaks of her first significant public encounter with patriarchy:

I found it to be very degrading. I thought it was and, but I didn't know how to react, because that's when I just got in as Chief. I went there and I had my buckskin dress and my headdress on. So I went there and I was shaking hands with people, you know, just having a very good day and just enjoying the day, and all of a sudden this guy comes up to me and he says, "The Elders want to talk to you," so I say "ok." So I went [and] there were three Elders sitting there. They said, "You are in *Treaty 4* territory and you're disrespecting our culture by wearing your headdress here, because you are a woman." And I said, "Oh, ok." I didn't know what to say or what to do. I said, "Ok, so what am I supposed to do?" They said well, "This guy can carry your headdress for you, but you can't wear it here." So, I said, "Oh, ok." So I took it off and let the guy carry it. I said I have to go to the washroom, so I went to the washroom, but then it just really hurt my feelings and I didn't know how to take it, so I phoned Jim. He said "Don't let it get to you, just hold your head up, and don't let them see that it bothers you." I had some eye drops in my purse so I put them in and I just held my head up. I made that guy carry my headdress, and I purposely sat at the front and made him sit beside me. But when I think back, I don't think it was those Elders. I think it was somebody else in that area that told those Elders, 'cause after, out of the three Elders, that one lady, after the ceremony, I know she felt bad, because she said, "You can wear your headdress for the pictures." They took

a big picture of everybody, because it was during the mace. They had a mace runner, a beaded mace runner, there was a moose hide little pillow there. So they had a big picture. So she said, "You can wear your headdress for the picture." I said, "No that's ok." And one of the Elders [who] was a guy, I think it was just last year, said "I don't know why they did that to you that day." That's what he said to me. He was one of the three.

So then I went to another gathering. There was a Treaty Gathering (*Treaty I – II*) at Fort Carleton. I didn't say anything then, but I took it to our Grand Council and Chief Wesley Daniels from Sturgeon Lake [before I went]. He was very supportive. He said, "Nobody, nobody," he said, "only your people can take that off your head, not anyone else but your people, your people put that on you." Because it's the Elders that put it on you at the swearing in ceremony. He said, "You're not wearing that as a woman, you're wearing it as a Chief." So at the gathering, I went up there [and] I was wearing my headdress because they were opening the bundle, the medicine bundle, and then he said, "You have to take off your headdress." He came running up to me and said, "You have to take off your headdress." I said, "No, I'm not going to take it off." He said "Why not?" I said, "Why, are you going to make all the other guys take off their headdresses too?" I said, "If you want me to take it off, I'll leave. I don't have to be here." He then went back and asked all the guys to take off their headdresses. So I went to that gathering. And when they made all the guys take off their headdresses, I finally said "Ok." They then blessed all the headdresses there. But [initially] I said, "No, I am not going to take it off." I just looked him in the eye and I said, "No."

Because I told myself, “I took it to the Grand Council and everybody in the assembly said no.” It actually came to that. Since then, no one has ever come up to me to ask me to take off my headdress. But I [still] do not think it was those Elders.

Cook-Searson acknowledges this time as her learning experience, and how even then, in the early stages of this tenure, she approached this conflict in a timely manner, within the protocols of *Treaty 6*, and with “soft power” (Vizina, 2013):

Yeah, but I didn’t do it right away, I did it slowly. I could have taken it to the media and said, “What’s going on here?” [She muses when she says,] it’s like when women couldn’t wear pants before. Yes, so all these different things that happened, I just think, ah. But then as you get older, you get stronger too, and then, with experience, you start to know what you can actually do.

There is no doubt this experience with patriarchy has influenced her understanding of leadership and the gender role identification reflected in this position:

I don’t really think of it as gender. I never really did. When I run I don’t run as a woman, I run as a person who can do the work. I don’t run to say I’m a woman. I just run as a person, and I try to be respectful to everyone as best as I can. I run as whom I am and on what I can do.

Ila Bussidor had similar experiences with patriarchy, and in many of our conversations she reflects on the patriarchy and lateral violence found with Indigenous communities across Canada:

When I became a leader in 1988, I was very young. It was not a women’s role, it was always a man’s role. So in 1988 there was an election happening and somebody

nominated me. I said “ok” and not thinking very far from just saying ok, and then of course my husband got upset because I didn’t ask him. It was, I think, the first time a woman was nominated to run for chief.

She tells me how the encouragement of her grandmother eased the fears of how she thought her male counterparts would react to her, a woman chief:

I was very young when I became a leader but I always wanted to fix a wrong, you know, to make a correction. And my granny said to me “If you see something laying somewhere and it’s all dirty and broken or something, but you want to fix it, you pick it up, you clean it off and you make it back to just the way it was before, just about but not the same.” It’s like that when you go and do a job, even if it’s a really bad situation, you try to work with it to make it right, to right a wrong. So I always felt when I walked into that leadership I was scared, there were no women, just men.... and they’d just think I’m young and stupid. You know, but I could pass a message to a crowd of people like this. All I had to say was one sentence and it would cut like a knife. So I was able to use words. I didn’t have to talk for hours and hours, or something like that, to convey a message.

When she ran for Chief of the Sayisi Dene, Ila Bussidor did so out of compassion and with the respect of and for her peoples. Today she continues to call for justice just as she did 15 years ago:

I thought about [it] because of the history of where we were coming from, *Dene Village* and the move, the way we grew up, why did my parents, why did they go the way they did? Why did all these other people, young guys freezing to death out there, somebody finding them in the morning. Where was the control in keeping

everybody together, like they did in Duck Lake, in our traditional territory and the way they did, even pre-contact, a long time ago? So, because justice was the first thing, healing and justice were my number one [issues], I wanted to go out there somewhere and tell somebody this is what they did to us and it's wrong and people are still suffering from that today. So that's the message that I started talking about out there to the leadership of Canada. And my first public presentation was in Quebec and I still have that presentation.

When overcoming the patriarchy and internalized lateral violence the *Sisters* speak of, the foundation of an interrelated respect becomes key to their collective vision of justice.

They call for roots of patriarchy and lateral violence to be exposed, and equally important, insist the root natures of these atrocities be addressed. Lee Maracle has this to say about the lateral violence found in Aboriginal communities: "Lateral violence among Native people is about our anti-colonial rage working itself out in an expression of hate for one another" (Maracle, 2002, p.1). In this analysis, lateral violence is about shaming, about blaming, about anger and about frustration. It is about the outputs of those emotions that show up in destructive relationships and infused violence. The women of *Sisters* believe this negativity must be countered with harmony, respect, sharing and love. The necessity of countering this negativity is advanced through ceremony, tradition and spiritual teachings; all critical parts to the move forward in a just leadership:

The Indigenous concept of justice goes beyond humanism and environmentalism to touch the realm of the spirit. It considers each natural element in the universe to have an integral power and purpose that must be recognized and respected. In effect, there is a sacred relationship not only among human beings, or between

human beings and the physical world, but among all creatures and elements and extending to the realm of the spirit. Each one of these relationships must be honoured and preserved if the human purpose is to be fulfilled. Justice is the achievement of balance in all these relationships, and the demonstration in both thought and action of respect for the dignity of each element in the circle of interdependency that forms our universe (Alfred, 1999, p.43).

Today Elder Stella Blackbird focuses her attention on supporting the notion of men learning from women. As she partners with both men and women, including past Grand Chief Ovide Mercredi, one of her most thoughtful male followers, she thinks back to when she began teaching men and how she understands women as leaders:

Yes, I learned that long ago. Women are the leaders. We used to have an Elder, years back women weren't given that voice. But when I received my pipe, not my pipe, the pipe I carry for the people, 'cause I don't own anything. I carry my bundle for the people. But, the Elder told me, "Now, you're ready." He taught me. I did ceremonies with him. He taught me how to do naming and other ceremonies. And he said, "You take your tobacco when you see men sitting in a circle and doing, you take your pipe and go and sit with them, put your tobacco there." So I remember coming home that night from Portage, "Why me?" I was thinking. You know, knowing that men used to walk away when I'd give lectures, like accountability to ourselves, and that you know a woman is not, they sort of treated us, men treated us like we only have one place. That is to clean the house, look after the children, cook all this, but never being a part of, like the Elder said, ceremonies. And we always had to keep away down. So in my

lectures I would say, “You know, a woman carried you, all of you.” There was one time, 800 people in Thunder Bay, workers from different areas, “A woman carried you for nine months in her womb. You lived in darkness in her womb. When you were born she looked after you, she nursed you, she looked after you when you were sick, when you wanted food, and right after when you go on your own, you forget, you forget about that woman that nurtured you. And it’s time you started respecting that woman. We weren’t meant to be hit, to be called down or to be disrespected in any way and it’s time to have that home, that happy home our people once had, where the women were leaders, where the women in camps were the leaders. That’s why the tipi is there in our honor, that skirt we wear. And they told the men when it was time to get the meat, the wood, and they taught the children the chores and everything and the men were supposed to be our protectors and our hunters and our warriors and today you don’t see that. And it’s time we bring that back. Because you men, you have arms and legs just like I do, and what is the matter with you... if you can’t get your wife a cup of tea instead of demanding by hitting a glass.” I said, “I know because that’s how I used to be, if my husband slammed his cup I jumped up for fear, [thinking] I’m going to be called down, lazy, you know. Now in my home, everything is equal, everybody helps, after we eat, the kids, people, haul the dishes. If it’s my husband’s turn to wash the dishes, he’ll do them. He used to be this big macho man,” I said, “he’d never touch, he’d say ‘that’s a woman’s job’. That’s just a belief, a myth” and I started naming all the myths, that’s not our way.

Cook-Searson sums it up with her knowledge in learning ceremony:

When you go to ceremonies, I've attended a pipe ceremony and there, they usually ask a lady to wear a blanket ... and I'll sit where the women are. There are certain things that people have to know. We have to respect each other in our belief systems.

The idea of respecting a multitude of belief systems is not new for Indigenous peoples; however, the call for a return to the feminine is a message many may not want to hear. Over and over again, I hear Indigenous women speaking of the disrespect they encounter from men and sometimes women, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The protection and honouring of woman is a theme found throughout the *Storywork of Sisters*, and thus, it is one that requires attention, continued voice and immediate action. This dismissal of the feminine is clearly seen in the non-action of the current Government of Canada, through the continued dismissal of the collective call for an inquiry into the thousands of murdered and missing Indigenous women of Turtle Island.

The voices of those in *Sisters* clearly speak to the gendered identity of being one among all these within their kinship, and while the feminine continues to be essentially critical to their life works, it is their Indigeneity of being Métis, or Cree, Dene and Inuit, which is the lifeblood of their leadership. Cook-Searson tells me about one of her friends: "She said, 'when I think about an Indian, I just think about you.' She said, 'It's because you live it'. Many of the women work closely with men, and many have apprenticed under the guidance of men. Not all, but some of the *Sisters* speak of their fathers and grandfathers having a significant influence on who they are today. Those few who do not, rely solely on their Indigeneity and the influence of the feminine. This is particularly true for Métis Elder Rose Richardson, who shares her Cree-Métis mother's

knowings as those with significant influence. All *Sisters*, however, point to the words and teachings of their grandmothers and mothers, as those holding special reverence and sacred knowings. In this revelation, it is imperative one understands a historical account of women's roles in Indigenous leadership and cultural teachings. If one returns to the historical roots of governance with the Cree, the Dene, the Inuit and the Métis, one can clearly see that each person, each man and each woman, held a role of equality, and that these roles collectively were responsible for the wellness of the kinship. It is a return to this equality, the *Sisters* envision for the future of their nations.

***Pimâcihiwêwin* - Redemption**

By their very presence, the women of *Sisters* hold roles that signify *Kanawayhitowin* as their foundation of responsibility, their “principle of care”. As seen through their active participation in Indigenous governance whether with their treaty partner, Canada, or with other associations and institutions, the *Sisters* embody the sacred teachings of love, respect, wisdom, courage, humility, honesty and truth. Within that responsibility, each points to avenues of healing and the critical actions of these segues which are associated with respect and redemption. To me, redemption is understood as atoning for a mistake, clearing a debt, or learning from the past to make something better. I believe that reconciliation is part of redemption, in that it brings peoples together, it allows for testimony and listening, and it works toward settling a difference through the alliance of apology and forgiveness. I have been told by Cree knowledge keeper Solomon Ratt that the Cree word which supports redemption is *pimâcihiwêwin* (Alberta Elder's Cree Dictionary) and it's meaning signifies a giving of life or a saving of life. In this Cree Indigenous understanding of redemption one sees how a conscious action might

move beyond the concept of reconciliation. The Indigenous, or more specifically, the Cree concept of redemption, applies the association and infusion of spirit, place and culture within kinship or *Wahkohtowin*. It is the resurgence of that holding or infusion through honouring in a public, physical, intellectual and spiritual way that gives it life. *Pimâcihiwêwin is to give life* (Ratt, 2014) and as such it holds close the Cree understanding of *Kanawayhitowin*, in the protection and honouring of the spirit. Winona LaDuke (2011c) shares an Indigenous concept of redemption as it relates to a story of the Pawnee peoples:

Sometimes I say, ‘what would Nelson do’... Ellen Johnson, she says [the first woman president of Liberia]... ‘I believe in redemption’ ...and so there are two sides of redemption. One side is the apology, in which the perpetrator says ‘what I did was wrong and I would like to make amends to you’. That has not happened ... and the other side is the offer of redemption, because as Mandela said, the perpetrator also carries this weight of the crime and becomes his own victim in that dynamic of having done something egregious and so in that guilt, the perpetrator is not healthy either. So the process of apology and redemption, or forgiveness, ya, is a mutual healing process. I believe it takes many levels, and you know, the best story I know is today, the story [of how] the Pawnees were driven from their home land in Nebraska, and with them they took there sacred foods that they grew, their pumpkins and their melons and their beans and their corn. And they moved to Oklahoma and they could not grow them, and their sacred seeds dwindled and dwindled until they had very few of some of those varieties. And then one day a descendent of the settlers in the Pawnee homeland

near Carnie, Nebraska called the Pawnees and said, ‘we would like to grow your seeds. Would you let us?’ The Pawnees deliberated long because they had very few left, but they sent seeds back to Nebraska and the seeds flourished. What the Pawnees told me was that the seeds remembered the land they came from, and in that there was both an apology and a redemption. And two years ago they had a Pawnee home coming, *Welcome Home Pawnee Days* in Carnie, Nebraska and 8000 people came to welcome the Pawnees home. And so in that story you have that corn is more than a food, it is a history, that seeds have spiritual meaning, and that corn in itself though, needs relationship to humans. You have the loss of that sacred relationship and the need in itself of those seeds for their land, and then you have people who make history through their redemption. I know you don’t have the footage of that... but I saw it. Isn’t that cool? To me those people in Carnie, Nebraska exemplify apology and redemption in action (LaDuke, 2011c, transcript video file).

This explanation of redemption is both an apology and a forgiveness, one that moves parties to a constitution of rightful action. Some might say it is one in the same as reconciliation in that it is offered to Indigenous peoples from settlers and it is granted by Indigenous peoples to settlers, as both move forward in an action to address the past hurts and abuses Indigenous peoples and their lands have endured. I believe it is more.

In this example of environmental racism, the removal and dislocation of Indigenous peoples for a settler industry is advanced, as is the spiritual of the cosmos in the concentration of life forms attached to the land itself. The significance of a disembodied spiritual land life is shown in the longing of the seed for a return to her

homeland and her peoples. In this case, the settler industry of agriculture and those engaged in it imposed a cultural and spiritual genocide for the Pawnee. It affected human, plant and animal life, and moreover, the spirit and biodiversity of the land, the peoples and the ecology of all these Indigenous seeds were almost lost. This story is an important story in of itself, but also as it relates to and gives life to the medicine stories of the grasslands, the taiga and the tundra, and the *Sisters* who protect the “seeds” here in this northern land known as Canada. It is *Pimâcihiwêwin*.

As we know, the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission Gatherings* held throughout Canada have officially concluded. Many sad and even horrific memories were stirred, many tears were shed, and many praises of hope were expressed in the *Storywork* of those who shared. It is imperative to continue to share these stories, and in the same way, the stories of environmental racism and redemption, like the one which arose in the conversation with Winona LaDuke (2011c). The world is watching as Indigenous peoples within the boundaries of Canada reclaim what was theirs. Their spirits, cultures, traditions and lands are intricately tied to their wellbeing, and to this understanding of redemption or *pimâcihiwêwin*. As shown in the stories of *Sisters*, one begins to learn it is about the journey and the transition to a place of apology, forgiveness and mutual healing, which allows both sides to come to a place of redemption and move to the next step in an active cycle of healing.

I embrace the *Storywork* in *Sisters of Sasipihkeyihtamowin*, as I am hopeful that others can move to this place of peace and understanding. For the *Sisters*, it is in their personal journeys, those which have carried them through the stages of resistance, reflection, re-emergence and re-vitalization, and in the ways these stories have helped

each *Sister* move to a place of redemption. It is in *pimâcihiwêwin* that the hearts and minds of youth and educators will be impacted. Some of these women are entering the middle stages of this journey while others have moved within the pathway of redemption to significant healing and resurgence. In this process, these women are healers, each in their own way, and each with her own knowledges, traditions and actions. All can learn much from their stories of *Pimâcihiwêwin*.

Seeking Mamatowisowin - Resurgence

I live my life as an example to others.

Rose Richardson

The people and the land are one.

Ila Bussidor

Stay strong and stand proud of our identity.

Jennifer Watkins

Leadership is just about helping people.

Tammy Cook-Searson

I get my vision from the children.

Stella Blackbird

We need to learn about 'balance'.

Joan Scottie

The things you need to know will come to you at the moment when you need to know them.

Yvonne Vizina

It will be the women who lead.

Marie Adam

As each of the women in *Sisters* extend their hearts and share their spirits with those around them, I think of the words of Cree educators, Michael Hart (2002) and Willie Ermine (1995). By honouring the Cree worldview, I look to the Indigenous knowledge embedded in the language of *Nēhiyawêwin*. This winter I spoke with Cree

philosopher and scholar Willie Ermine after he presented the spiritual contextualization of wellness. The depth of his philosophical and intuitive understanding held in this broad conceptualization of Earth energy is a reflection of the work the women of Sisters do: “*mamatowisowin* is the capacity to connect to the life force that makes anything and everything possible” (Ermine, 1995, p.110). While this word is generally translated to a meaning closely related to “wellness” or the “good life”, Hart sees it as “the experience of being alive and seeing the goodness in all life as it is experienced” and he further defines it as “in a state of being-in-becoming, the active seeking of one’s purpose” (Hart, 2002, p.47). Faith (2007) cites the Cree-English dictionary translation as one that encompasses “spiritual power, talent; giftedness” (Wolvengrey, 2001, p. 86). In her exploration of this concept she turned to Cree knowledge holders Joseph Naytowhow and Wes Fineday. Joseph believes *mamatowisowin* relates to “being in tune with the universe, and is a sacred place of the mind,” while Wes understands it to be “a state of being spiritually gifted as a result of what we earn through practicing personal integrity.” (Naytowhow and Fineday in Faith, 2007, p.24).

Although the *Sisters* come from distinct lands and knowledge systems, and they hold specific cultures and traditions of their own kinships, I argue that seeking *mamatowisowin*, although embedded within a Cree worldview, can be conceptualized as the springboard to a resurgence for all. It is a concept that gives hope to all members of a kinship, as all persons and all living entities have an ability to “be in tune with the universe” (Naytowhow, 2007, in Faith, p. 24). This understanding supports ancient knowledge found also in the Métis, Dene, Inuit and other Indigenous nations. The positionality of feminine Indigeneity found in the solidarity of these women is grounded

by the foundation of *mamatowisowin*. This I believe makes their work a spiritual and peace-giving leadership.

Recent media attention of *The Orenda* (Boyden, 2103) has shifted Joseph Boyden's transferal depth of Indigeneity into the hearts and minds of many Canadians. It is, however, his earlier work and in particular, the story of *Black Spruce* which defines the roles of redemption and resurgence for a Canadian public, or at least for me. It is more than a coming out and a welcoming per se of Indigenous peoples to their rightful place in Canadian society. It is this understanding of history that is critical. Boyden believes, if we are not learners of our histories and if we do not recognize Indigenous peoples in this nation-to-nation history, we are doomed to a repeat of past atrocities and hurts. Armed with this knowledge, I pledge my best effort to ensure the public understands the histories of the *Sisters* and their lands. In this way, I honour the resurgence they are experiencing and the depth of their traditional Indigenous knowledges as found in their *Storywork*. In this section, I present ways in which these women seek solidarity, how they build relations between Elders and youth, and how they act as the keepers of balance for their kinships as they project teachings of peace.

Seekers of Solidarity

Acknowledging and claiming the reality of environmental racism takes courage. It requires years of observation and collective memory to recognize the severity of this oppression. It also takes the collaboration of clear thinkers, those who understand policy and those who live in the presence of an oppressive experience, to succinctly move to a position of authentic solution. Throughout this research process, the women of *Sisters* have indicated a great interest in the life stories of each other; they have expressed to me

their commonalities and their desires to meet ‘the other’ (LaRocque, 2010) and as they hold the stories of their *Sisters* close to their hearts, they hope for a collective push in addressing the environmental and social ills which plague their communities.

In understanding how important solidarity is in addressing the compounding issues of environmental racism in the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples, I examine what Cook-Searson says about her community:

We have so many good people in our community, there’s so much happening. We have staff, directors, and councilors. There are so many people that are trying to do good for the youth and the children in our community. Our different agencies, programs and services, [but] I know for a fact, we’re not reaching all the kids, all the families. When you think about our education system, we are so underfunded. [It seems] just because you are an Indian, you are underfunded. Because of who you are. We always have to make do with what we get.

What I find [difficult] is the access to different services. For example, in the Indian residential school case, there is money available for counseling but it’s hard to access. There is a [process] in place, how to access it, but if you want to get counseling in PA or Saskatoon you have to upfront the money, and not everybody has money to upfront the gas and the meals. You have to wait three months to get reimbursed and the rates are really low. And there are only so many people that are in La Ronge that can provide counseling. For example, we have our communities of Stanley Mission, Grandmothers Bay, Sucker River, Hall Lake and Little Red. What kind of services are people there accessing? A lot of times people don’t have, and even if you work full time, you are barely keeping

up with your bills. So, it makes it hard to access that kind of counseling. When you think about it, the people feel powerless, even for us, as the largest band in Saskatchewan.

In recognizing the powerlessness some members of their kinships feel, the women of *Sisters* see the antidote to this in community based solutions and interdependent cooperation. Joan Scottie has this to say:

It has always been easier tackling issues when we know the root of the problems (cultural/traditional) but with new issues, we have to look for new answers. Living in a community, we need “community based” resolvers. We must work together to look for answers and resolve the ‘community’ problems. Which means, working together as a group. [Still] there has to be, often, a leader to tackle the issues...sometimes strong persons take action or are appointed as leaders.

Yvonne Vizina reflects on the Indigenizing of solidarity:

We need to do some work on helping our community members with decision-making processes and conflict resolution skills. A long time ago, these were called “councils” and served to assist communities and individuals with acting in the best interest of the group. I think the idea of individuality has really gone over the top in some regards. There was an educational theorist named Abraham Maslow who created a chart representing a hierarchy of human needs. At the foundation were the necessities of life, like food and safety, etc. At the very top of the chart were the needs of individual fulfillment and self-actualization. Yes, this is important for all people, I think, however, we have to reach beyond this

level of self-actualization and see how that is best applied to the well-being of a group. I think most of us know this, but really, there is an “every man for himself” mentality that is prevalent. Yet, in nature, cooperation is much more important for survival than competition. So, we need to find the means to develop our ability to cooperate with each other on issues, solve problems together, minimize conflict to the extent possible and get on with taking real ownership of our environment rather than just wishing for it.

Scottie has a final thought on this process:

I think it starts from the family. You have to have a sense of security, and I guess as parents too, as leaders, we have to protect our youth. You know, we’re not directing them, we’re not. I guess all our members are not giving enough voice to the young people. As to living in the community, it’s just not working in some areas, as it should be. You know the leaders should be leading to better health and everything, education and social issues, and the whole bit, but it’s not. It’s a big job. Everybody should be really supporting each other, you know for the better health of our families and community.

Builders for Elder and Youth Relations

In the past thirty years, the women of *Sisters* have extended their knowledges to many people from all walks of life. In this extension, Cook-Searson holds a special place for the young people in her communities. She comments on the vulnerability of the young people she knows and how everyone needs to open their hearts and minds to the realities of youth. The seeking of solidarity implies a welcoming and in this welcoming, a holding of esteem is preserved for each member within a community:

It could be not having a safe place to live too. You know feeling secure and safe is key to be able to open up your mind to learning. There must be a way, because I know there are some successful programs. I watched a documentary in Regina, where they did a program and brought in a few young people to try and encourage them to get them into the work force, educate them a bit, to make sure they weren't into drugs or alcohol. When you are in a vulnerable state, it's like you reach out to try and fit in, and then sometimes people don't have your best interests at heart. All they think about is for themselves, and they don't think about your own wellbeing. There are actually people that will take advantage of that. So if you are in a vulnerable state, it's much easier for people to take advantage of you that way. [The youth think] they'll be nice to them but yet they're deceiving. Finding a way to help young people, to empower them, empower them to help them see their own worth without having to compromise their own well being, and respecting them too. I always find that sometimes people try to push their own belief systems and their own ways of thinking, it seems that their way is the only way.

This empowerment of youth is critical to the life wellness of the kinship, and essentially, the life wellness of *Earth*. Yvonne Vizina comments on her understanding of youth wellness and the role of adults, traditional peoples and other leaders in helping young people come to a place of *mamatowisowin*:

I think you have to look at the idea of environmental racism and how it affects the youth of our lifetime through a traditional lens in order to consider the question. That is, there is a degree of wellness that I see in our youth. Youth that aspire to

have exciting futures, do well in school, contribute meaningfully to their families, and participate in cultural activities. Fundamentally, there are many things going well and youth have many opportunities and often have very good support systems. So, that said, there are, of course, also differences between what youth seek in their lives compared to what we might want for them. I think to an extent these are generational differences that always exist. Change can be good and healthy in itself even if we don't recognize the value in it right away...or ever. I can't say that I know what youth will need to ensure their survival in the future. No one can. But, there are certain principles and values that we hope they will uphold – like maintaining good relations built on a foundation of traditional concepts of respect. Learning traditions of their culture; being free to creatively adapt to their own reality; freedom from abuse and violence and racism. I think those who succumb to drugs, alcohol, or other forms of addiction do so because they are spiritually lost. So, eventually they come to realize that these hazardous habits cannot give them real happiness. At those times, there is a need for a strong community of caring people who can help them reconcile their lives and the pains they have endured. Often no one really knows the spiritual or psychological wounds others carry. Ensuring youth (or any person) has access to forgiveness and guidance to a healthy life is an essential part of everyone's life. But, again, this is not something easily obtained. Sometimes, the old people say, the best healing comes from simply helping others. Showing compassion, sharing humour, hard work, eating healthy are simple steps one can take to improve your health. If someone is suffering physical sickness, there can be reasons for that

that we don't know. There are so many chemicals in our environment that it is affecting all living things, and now we are seeing the effects of scientific 'brilliance' in the destruction of our atmosphere, water systems and the biodiversity that sustains life ... all that is life. It is a sad irony really. I have been told that the traditional people who do ceremonies according to their cultural beliefs are those who are holding this world together. I believe that. I think about that all the time and try to remember to pray for those people because I am so grateful. The First Nations and Métis Elders that have helped guide my thinking have been kind and generous with their knowledge. I think about those old people when I meet new people, my own age or younger, and I see in them a lot of anger and even hatred at times. I feel sad about that because it can easily destroy someone's life, and also those harmful energies transfer to other people. So, ultimately, disconnection from the land and traditional knowledges of cultures influences the direction of youth thinking, it impairs spiritual and emotional development, and it usually manifests in unhealthy life-choices.

This reflection calls for a coming back to the Elder teachings, a theme referenced by every *Sister* in this research. For these women, revitalization and resurgence, a coming back to tradition and culture through language and ceremony, is critical for Indigenous peoples' health, well-being and connectedness. Ila Bussidor understands how neo-colonial factors have impacted the health of her peoples and she reminds us of the importance of language and culture:

The young people are very disconnected; the language is just about gone. So, what I know, it is because I know my language. I can speak my language very well, and if I

didn't have that I wouldn't be able understand what my granny was saying to me. And all the things that Elders gave me, the information. The language is the connection to that. The oral history is part of their identity as a Dene people, and they're disconnected. So the only way they could learn about that is by providing [them] the people who know the language.

Ila Bussidor and Elder Marie Adam see language revitalization as one of the most critical areas of solution building for youth, and they believe it is a way to seek healing for their kinships. Marie shares this:

Well that's how I was taught; everything was oral. And that way, I find when you hear things orally and are taught in an oral way, you remember. Not writing it down, but by putting it in your mind. It registers there; don't put it on a piece of paper.

Bussidor calls out to all knowledge keepers to help her with this step in resurgence:

[There are] very few Elders, maybe there's five that are still alive with us today and once they're gone, you know, that part of the history is gone. The young people don't speak the language; they only speak English. So it would take people that have gathered that kind of information. There are a few of us that can begin to teach them about the values and the pride that our people have.

Aligned with Bussidor and Adam, Joan Scottie calls out to young people and reminds all of the importance of language and culture. She draws attention to an important realization, that language cannot be separate from the preservation of tradition or land living:

People need more information. Like the rest of the world, everything is changing in Baker Lake. The traditional people, the people who knew how to respect the environment and the wildlife, are passing away. People are coming in off the land, and what we have left are community dwellers. The younger generation hears our government and our aboriginal organizations telling us that life in a community is the best way to live. But today, the younger generation is speaking more English than people my age, who are still communicating mostly in Inuktitut. I have a daughter and two grandchildren. Even my grandchildren speak only in English, with a little bit of Inuktitut. My mother and my granddaughter can barely communicate, which is too bad. This problem has gotten out of hand. There is a lot of talk about protecting our language, but culture and tradition is one. You have to respect your traditional cultural values and beliefs, because once you lose sight of what your elders respected, you lose the language.

If I have a message for young people, it is that I wish for us Nunavut Inuit to preserve our language. We should also strive to maintain our culture and heritage and respect for our ancestors, who survived because they respected the environment and wildlife. We should all continue to learn more about our heritage: what part of Nunavut did one's ancestors come from? Where were their seasonal hunting grounds? What areas of the land were important to them and what are we doing politically to protect those places? This is important to me, because that little corner out there on the land, in Ferguson Lake or in *Qurnguryuaq*, that is where my spirit lives.

Vizina draws our attention to the importance of Indigenous science and the role of Elders, knowledge keepers and educators in supporting youth:

My thinking has always been that if young people have opportunities to understand traditions and academics, they will draw their own conclusions about what needs to be done and develop their own particular expertises. I don't claim to have all the answers, but I believe that if I give to others what I have, and know, that they will certainly surpass what I can do. I have a lot of faith in young people. Since it is mandatory for all children to attend school, I think school needs to be re-designed to facilitate the perpetuation of cultural traditions along with the contemporary needs. You can easily learn about biology, chemistry, physics, law, etc. by being involved with community cultural activities.

Elders Marie Adam and Stella Blackbird spend a great deal of time with children in schools, daycares and cultural camps. Each believes in the power of story to relay a message. I recall Marie telling me about how she tells the young children to be careful when they step near the ladybugs, because, like her, they are grandmothers too! She comments on her role in schools, "I go to the schools and tell them about the legends and different things, and the water, and about all the living beings on Mother Earth." She comments on the difficult work it is when supporting high school students in understandings historical trauma, that trauma seen through her eyes and her experiences at Holy Names Residential School in Fort Chippewan, Alberta:

I did the whole school. I started I think at 9:00 o'clock in the morning and by 2:00 o'clock I just broke down. This happened at the last [presentation], and my granddaughter was in that class, and she was almost in front of me. And I was

watching her and just saw the tears running down her face, and other students too.

I just had to stop, but then I said to myself, “finish it” and I did finish it.

A lover of children, Elder Stella Blackbird, sees herself as one who can influence youth in a positive way. I believe the children of the many organizations and schools she supports encompass what *mamatowisowin* means for her:

I think because I am happy. I am always grateful. Especially when I see the children go to school. Sometimes they come to cultural camp. They feel and call me *KooKoo* (Ojibway) or in Cree, *Kookum*. *Mooksag*, is many little bears (Child Care Educational Centre in Winnipeg). I get my vision from the children. At Flora House there are after school programs for kids 5 -17, and there are cultural camps with groups of children. We pick bergamot and yarrow. It is so beautiful to see kids picking. We pick in a buffalo pasture, making sure the buffalo are not to close. Then sometimes, story times, I used to go to Seven Oaks School in Winnipeg. It's kind of exciting, funny, and amusing. I have the kids sit in double circles, so it doesn't take so long. We do smudging, dance the round dance, and there are all kinds of kids from different ethnic backgrounds.

The beauty of Elder Stella Blackbird's teachings became very clear to me when she and Elder Audrey Bone travelled to La Ronge from the Keeseekoowenin First Nation in the spring of 2010 to extend cultural teachings to students in the Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP). The gratitude extended to Elders Blackbird and Bone from the students of my class and another signified the immense learning and spiritual connections these Elders had made with young people. Of critical importance was the relevance of their roles to those students with Cree heritages. A number of these students told me that

they were deeply moved by the teachings of Stella Blackbird. The responses from these learners, and the thanks given to me for arranging this opportunity, are important gifts of acknowledgement. I thank the educators and students of NORTEP for that privilege.

As Elders and keepers of knowledges, the women of *Sisters* hold important roles in the revitalizations of language, tradition and culture. Their knowledges of a lived history, traditional dialogue and ceremony are critical to the resurgence of wellness for all Indigenous peoples.

Negotiators of Balance and Sustainability

The women of *Sisters* are mergers of contemporary economics and traditional ecological knowledges. As such, they are grounded in the Indigenous knowings of their ancestors and they understand *Earth* wisdom intuitively and explicitly. Their experiences with western governments, and the agencies of such, clear a pathway for the dance in which these women are engaged, that of economic and legal maneuvering while keeping their visions of ecological balance and sustainability for their lands and kinships clearly in their sights. In addressing the social and environmental ills the colonial impacts of industry perpetuate, each woman has her own set of knowledges and practical experiences. The words of Chief Tammy Cook-Searson should be noted, as she, like Sharon Venne, Cree legal scholar, is sure the Elders have not “ceded, surrendered, and forever given up title to the lands” (Venne, 2002):

We are always asserting our rights. [Sometimes] you also have the push back.

You know, you have Premier Brad Wall saying “No way in my time as the Premier will there be a resource revenue sharing for any special groups.” He refers to us as a special group and we are not a special group. We have a treaty,

an inherent right to these lands, and we agreed to share these lands. Somehow, I think our lands have been “legally” taken. Because they [the governments] developed the rules and regulations on how to take over control of the lands.

Every *Sister* expresses dissatisfaction with the legal binds of neo-colonial legislations, and Cook-Searson and Elder Rose Richardson, are particularly concerned with government policies that prevent local people from protecting and using traditional lands. Both express concern over the leasing of lands for tourism and this infusion of the euro-centric notion of leisure and land use. As Cook-Searson shared her concerns with me about Parks Canada and the Saskatchewan provincial parks division, I heard about the dismissive nature of officials, and the policy which limits her memberships’ access to the territory of these “protected lands,” particularly in the termination of harvesting rights. At that moment, I reflected on Elder Stella Blackbird and her stories of Riding Mountain National Park and Clear Lake, the infusion of assimilation, the dislocation of a peoples, and the land encroachment for white settler privilege and enjoyment. I also reflected on the counter-story of resistance and the redemption found through the efforts of both the peoples of Keeseekoowenin Ojibway First Nation and Parks Canada itself.

Elder Rose Richardson reminds us that it is “important that people reflect on the lifestyles of the ancestors and how they survived”. She has indicated on more than one occasion that the cooperative manner in which peoples survived long ago must be returned to, and within that process, youth should have access to relevant cultural materials, knowledge keepers and oral tradition. The resurgence of oral tradition and the advancement of cooperative and green economies are key in her analysis. Like her Métis sister Rose, Yvonne Vizina, recognizes the importance of open dialogue, natural laws and

traditional ecological knowledges. As a contributor of Indigenous science and environmental policy, Vizina has this to say:

Regarding the efforts to overcome environmental racism, I think that we need to have more open dialogue within our Nations, not only about the ‘rights’ questions, but about the kinds of activities that our people would like to be doing. There is so much effort being directed towards securing rights (and that is very important) but I think we expend our limited resources there instead of taking action on improving cultural content in education for our communities. As well, I think redesigning education to be more environmentally conscience will benefit all people, not just Aboriginal Peoples. I would like to see Aboriginal community groups being active in learning more about the environment – especially urban programming, but also rural and northern. Elders teachings, spending time in the natural world, learning natural laws, identifying species and learning the traditional knowledge that go along with those things are all so important.

Teachers of Peace - *Aniki kâ-pimitisahahkik pâyâhtakêyimowin*

Aniki kâ-pimitisahahkik pâyâhtakêyimowin is the Cree term that means “those that follow peace” (Cree word gifted to me by Ratt, 2014). In exploring the resistances of Indigenous women, I have always taken great interest in the work of Mohawk resister, Ellen Gabriel, a peaceful and authentic sister of Indigenous peoples. Gabriel, best know for her negotiating role in the Oka crisis, has been advancing the critical role of women in Indigenous communities for a lifetime. She sees women as the carriers of language, culture, history and love. In January of this year, she wrote an article entitled “*Those Who Carry the Burden of Peace*” and in this reflection, she shares her wisdom of ancient

knowledge systems, teachings of peace, physical training of “warriors” and the ceremonies her peoples historically engaged in to prepare for battle, or to protect their traditional lands. She acknowledges the Clan Mothers and Chiefs as the voices of the people, and as such, points to their role in traditional dialogue and negotiation and to the nature of their directing young “warriors” within their clans. She reminds the reader of how the media demonized the term “warrior” during the “Oka Crisis.” She draws attention to its resurgence, and how the current positioning of this definition has one interpretation for kinships, and another for policing authorities and governments. As she says, the demonization of the term is resurging. Although those anxious to dismantle peaceful resistances often view Indigenous activists as “warriors”, she brings to light the role of women as peaceful resisters and the truth in the meaning of “warrior.” “In Haudenosaunee customary laws, the women are the protectors of the land and hold title to the land, while the men were the protectors of the people” (Gabriel, 2014, para 3). This statement is critical to the work of the women in *Sisters*. Each one of these women is a protector of the land and kinship; and each one searches for peace in that protection.

In the Haudenosaunee language of Kanien’kéha, “*Rotiskenrakéh:te*” refers to those *who carry the burden of peace* (Gabriel, 2014). In asking for assistance in finding a similar meaning in the Cree language, I was told by Cree knowledge keeper, Solomon Ratt, there is no such word or specific term which references the word of burden in this way, rather, there is an acknowledgement of those who “follow peace”. For some reason, I was elated to know there was no translation of this word found within the Cree language. Instead, each experience, it seemed to me, is a teaching, a lesson, a coming out, or a resistance, rather than a burden. The discovery of this, and I thank Solomon for

this, made me weep. Many times, I have heard family and friends referring to one of my children as “my burden” so perhaps the discovery of this “omission” validated my position in thinking *burden* is not what we are experiencing. The role and the value of each person, each Clan Mother and each daughter, in the way Cook-Searson defines, honours and validates roles in a kinship, should perhaps be applied to the way in which we analyze our experiences in the search for justice, or in a search for peace. *Perhaps it is that peace is not a burden at all. Perhaps it is that peace is not carried, but rather, journeyed. Perhaps, in fact, peace is a journey of love, in which a place upon the path is set for each member of a community.*

When I think about the lives and the peaceful and loving actions of those who are *Sisters*, and when I think about how their body politic impacts the consequences of wellness in their communities, and equally for themselves, I see clearly how *woman as land* is critical to the dignity of humanity and the sustainability of *Earth*. In this I heed the words of Alex Wilson, a member of the Opaskawayak Cree Nation:

I always return to the Cree philosophy of *sakihwawin*⁴—showing love in our actions. I think that philosophy is there for a reason—it has not only sustained us, but enabled us to survive for 50,000 plus years. It's a natural law, or energy, and when it is interfered with, there are physical and spiritual consequences. So perhaps what we are seeing today, the tipping point, is the culmination of these consequences having a collective impact on the environment (Wilson, A., 2014, para 5).

⁴ Swampy Cree dialect

In *The Winter We Danced* (2014), Alex Wilson references the importance of women's work through the *Idle No More* movement and their adherence to *sakihiwawin*. So it is this natural law, the one of *sakihiwawin*, I believe, which validates the positions, the voices and the actions of the women *Sisters*. Their peaceful resistances and their attention to the love of what they do for those they serve is a vital piece of redemption and resurgence. The upholding of *sakihiwawin* by these teachers of peace is critical, timely and necessary. Their actions have paved the way for all to become *Aniki kâ-pimitisahakkik pêyâhtakêyimowin* in this collective journey.

Chapter VII – Witnessing as Wâpamon

We Natives know a lot about Canadian history, but Canadians know very little about us.

Ellen Gabriel

Where do you begin telling someone their world is not the only one?

Lee Maracle

As I draw this effort to a close, I reflect on the gift of awakening I have received from the *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin*. I think about my conversations, the questioning and the listening, and the spaces in between. In this reflection I think about my travels to the traditional lands of my *Sisters*, and about those I have yet to visit. I think about the power and the spirit of the land, and the energies I received from those lands. I think about the spirit knowings found within the voices of the *Sisters* and the privilege of listening to their stories, and truly hearing. I think about the emotion, the laughter, the tears, and the exhaustion I encountered on this path, and mostly, I think of the joy I have experienced and shared, and within this recognition, I ponder the emotions and wonderments of my *Sisters*. I wonder how this journey has affected each of them, how it has influenced their synergies, and how they will use this research to help their kinships.

In this reflection, I have come to understand my search to unearth Indigenous women's resistances and their quests for wellness has become much more than what I had envisioned. The question of understanding how the *Sisters* confront, expose and counter environmental racism has evolved into a forward-looking journey of love and peace. It is, I believe, a journey that has just begun. The *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin* have gifted me their friendships, their words, their emotions, their knowledges, their dreams and their love. This gift of relationship is one of the most significant of my life

and because of it I pledge to honour these women throughout my life. After years in this academic journey, I recognize that I, like each of the *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyihtamowin*, am now a witness in this quest for justice.

Wâpamon is the Cree word meaning “clear reflection, a mirror” of which we are (Alberta Elder’s Cree Dictionary, 1998, p. 221) and I advance it as a metaphor for understanding witnessing. In my examination of *Wâpamon*, I sought both practitioners and scholars who supported my analysis of witnessing and testimony through the clarity of a mirror, or through clear reflection and knowing. When Winona LaDuke (2004) draws attention to the “mirror,” and the reflection of land wellness and, simultaneously, the health of Aboriginal women and the body politic of Indigenous peoples, she demands we pay close attention to how we are treating *Mother Earth*. In a similar vein, *Nuu-chah-nulth* Elder and scholar, Richard Atleo (2011) draws attention to *Tsawalk* (one) as he shows how the Indigenous principles of this knowing support *Haw’ilume* (Wealthy Mother Earth) in her time of duress. By showing others a reflection of the natural laws of the *Nuu-chah-nulth*, he leads people to an Indigenous understanding of hope and light, *Huupak an’um*. Within this constitutional metaphor of *Huupak an’um*, he embeds the honouring of Indigenous knowledges to solidify principles of recognition, consent, continuity and respect within this Indigenous worldview of wellness. Like LaDuke (2004) and Michell (2005), Atleo draws from Indigenous knowledge to show how *Earth’s* reflection *on* and *of* the human is infused in her natural environment. He signifies the criticality of being in balance with nature, a necessity for the flourishing and sustainability of humanity and other earth entities. Watching closely or witnessing what transpires in this mirror of nature is a necessary, critical action for all humans. It is the

reflection of the natural that supports a walk in hope and light; it is this that is required for a walk in wellness with *Mother Earth*.

As I reflect on the work of LaDuke, Michell and Atleo, I think of Emma LaRocque and how her knowledge of “the other” has helped me recognize my connection to Indigenous women and further, to my position in becoming one who has resisted neo-colonial impacts and the infringements of environmental racism (LaRocque, 2010). In this *conscientization*, I believe I am no different than Chief Tammy Cook-Searson and the other women who fight patriarchy or neo-liberalized initiatives found within the realities of environmental racism. Throughout their lives, it seems the women of *Sisters* have adapted a gendered Indigenous resistance, and I believe a cultural authenticity that honours the feminine. This idea of the feminine, however, is not framed within the western notion of gender, nor in the eurocentric understanding of a liberalized feminist movement.

That being said, in the earlier stages of this thesis, I have drawn the links between spiritual feminists such as Starhawk, and the embracement of eco-feminism as a supporter of Indigeneity and Indigenous women. Although there is still some resistance towards the “white” liberal feminist agenda, several Indigenous scholars are exploring the links between Indigenous matriarchal tradition and feminist theory. Historically, many Indigenous societies of Turtle Island were matrilineal and matrifocal. Women held positions of leadership, made decisions regarding land ownership and use, and were responsible for kinship protocol, ritual and ceremony, as well as the education and socialization of children. Indigenous cultures advanced equilibrium among peoples, women, men, two-spirited individuals, and even children to generate healthy social

interactions and relationships among the kinship and beyond. The Indigenous principles of equilibrium, inter-relationality and interdependence are part of natural law. They have been since time immemorial and they will always exist as a synergy of human and *Earth* wellness.

Although many of the women in this study work with men, and have been mentored by both their fathers and their mothers, the *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyihitamowin* have resisted what is known as the *heterosexuality of the land* (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011). Although patriarchal ideology and examples of hetero-patriarchal abuses are evident in tribal politics, and in industry, community, and family based actions impacting both the body politic of Indigenous women and the *Earth* they walk on, these women have disrupted what is deemed the “normal” in their resistances of environmental racism and their quests for peace and justice. The relationship each *Sister* has with her homeland reflects the power captured in the love of place and the understanding of nature’s interdependence; it seems this power acts as a transformer, one that honours the feminine within a leadership framework embodied in a logic of decolonization. A significant directive found in this study references a return to tradition, a learning about the old ways, and a leadership by Indigenous women as the logic behind the dismantling of colonial and patriarchal measures.

Found throughout the themes of this work, through their own personal resistances against local forms of environmental racism, through their reflections, and the ways in which they re-emerged and revitalize themselves, these women have moved beyond a victim narrative, often found in resistance stories of patriarchy, to a place of identity in which their body politic extends beyond their own tribal boundaries. Through the telling

of their stories, and in the joining of this research network and in a sense, each others kinships, the *Sisters* have reclaimed space and autonomy, not only for themselves, but for the members of their kinships, and in particular the young people of their communities. The stories they tell disrupt colonial narratives, and they act as an empowering political identity and a cultural change agent for the next seven generations. As these women redeem their histories and resurge in their current life work, they embody *Wâpamon*. Their positionalities and their actions are encompassed in a whole being of emotion, intellect, physicality and spirit in the power of witnessing. The infusion of the *Sacred* is evident in each of these women in the ways they interact with other humans and living entities, and the *Earth* herself. In reflecting upon the life works of the *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyitamowin*, I have come to believe that the act of *Wâpamon* as witnessing is a distinctly spiritual action of conscientization.

Of Witnessing, Healing, and Imagination

This year I met Catherine Odora Hoppers and I was overjoyed to take in the entirety of who this justice worker is. She is an African woman who is larger than life, humorous, humble, animated and joyful; a Ugandan who lost many members of her family and was exiled to Sweden for more than 30 years, an educator, and a woman who knows how to dance. As the current Chair of Educational Development for the University of South Africa, her legal and moral mind weaves the knowledges of professor emeriti, Elders or wisdom keepers, and students into a mix supporting the reclamation of Indigenous knowledges worldwide. She embodies an understanding of “cognitive justice”, “radical witnessing” and “wounded healing” through her own life history (Odora Hoppers, 2014, personal conversation).

Catherine Odora Hooper advocates for new learning, and a way in which a “cognitive justice” may prevail. In her advancement of this concept, she contends leaders require skills that move beyond them beyond premises associated with economics and marketplace survival to “cumulatively cope with the imperatives of co-existence, of solidarity and of human dignity (Odora Hoppers, 2008, p.9). In this coming out, Odora Hoppers confronts colonialism and imperialism as she references herself as a “radical witness and a wounded healer” (Odora Hoppers, 2014, personal conversation). I believe the “radical witnessing” of her counter-story supports the contextualization of “blood memory” (Anderson, 2000) as it clears, heals and honours the hearts and minds of Indigenous peoples so collectively, they may pursue a sustainable co-existence.

In referencing *Wâpamon* as a way of witnessing, I advance it as a counter position to the “mirror of western identity” (Odora Hoppers, 2014) and thus, western ways of knowing in which both academics and academics themselves adhere to. In order to recover Indigenous knowledges and traditional values in this support of the “wounded,” Odora Hoppers (2014) claims we must move from observers to “radical witnesses,” a conscious movement shown in our thoughts and actions. It is through experiences of this nature, or those of the “radical witness”, one becomes centered in the concept of *Pimâcihiwêwin* or redemption. Seemingly, it is with this recognition, one is given the opportunity to move to a place of resurgence or *Mamatowisowin*. Decisions we make today are essential to the wellness of those seven generations who follow in our footsteps.

As a witness, Yvonne Vizina often travels across our lands and beyond, to meet other Indigenous peoples in their territories, within their spaces of comfort and knowing, upon their homelands. She admits the work of dismantling environmental racism and

reaching out to others while trying to stay on a pathway of ecological justice is overwhelming, and it is as complex as it is necessary:

Environmental destruction feels like a run-away train now and although we presumably have the intelligence and the tools to stop it, for some reason we don't. I believe that we have to do it collectively at the same time or it won't be successful. Perhaps it will take a global crisis before we take action, although knowledge of climate change impacts doesn't seem to have sunk into the general population yet. I get discouraged when people tell me they are doing their part recycling milk cartons when millions of gallons of water are being wasted in petroleum development, forests are being clear-cut, and species are going extinct because they no longer have adequate habitat for survival.

I think if you wanted to have a real list of the ecological damages done across most of Canada it would be overwhelming. Endangered species, polluted water, urban sprawl, agriculture, river dams, mining, the list goes on and on. Saskatchewan mines uranium and Ontario has several nuclear facilities. Now, there is a need to make decisions about how to store nuclear waste. This waste is extremely dangerous and will be for hundreds of years. There are some communities in what are considered geologically stable areas that want to take this waste material for long-term storage underground. But, all our ecosystems are connected not only by land, but also through the air and water and energy systems and so these are decisions that affect us all. The decisions we make today, or in our lifetime, will affect all living things in the future.

Through this reflection, we know that much collaborative work, traditional dialogue, and deep understanding must be sought to preserve our *Mother Earth* and all she sustains.

We know that in order to influence the hearts and minds of others, witnessing must be encouraged, offered, and advanced.

Examples of this invitation to witness are often found in the works of international journalists, artists, photographers, and other creatives, just as they are found in the work of scholars, justice leaders, street people and labourers. Testimonial reading (Boler, 1999), moral imagination (Senehi, 2002) and witnessing (McCall, 2011) collectively contribute to the power found in *Storywork*. These *three* subjects are called upon by creative people in a multitude of places and homelands, and through diverse medias and knowledge keepers. Testimony, imagination and witnessing come to the “tellers” in the oral stories of Indigenous peoples, for example, those which can be found through the understanding of Treaty, and the nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and the *11 Treaty Nations*; and they are found in the story of the Wampum Belt. The constructs which lead humanity to witness come in the forms of Indigenous science and spiritual knowings, and although neo-conservatism plays a role in diminishing these knowings by rationalizing western technical thought, they still come. They come in the form of *Coyote* and *Wisakechak* and *Raven*, and through the legends Elders Marie Adam, Stella Blackbird and others relay to young children; and they come through the allyship and art of international folk like Susan Aglukart, Neil Young, Christie Belcourt, James Cameron, Tomson Highway, Alanis Obomsawin, Richard Wagamese, Maria Campbell and Adam Beach. The stories of blood diamonds, the Alberta tar sands, and the melting of global ice flows are three such stories that bring our attention to the unraveling of life

and the disembodying of humanity and the biospheres of *Earth*, all within the realm of environmental racism.

Canadian photographer and scientist, James Balog, draws our attention to the demise of the glaciers and the necessity of the “radical witnessing” required for all of us who intend to play a role in the countering of global warming and environmental racism. His work in *National Geographic* shows how sea ice and permafrost melts are creating new habitats and how, within those changes, the destructive outcomes are infused upon all living within these biospheres. Balog’s work supports the “radical witnessing” of Joan Scottie, and just as she has predicted, he confirms the thinning of Arctic ice. He believes that without critical action, the retreat of the glaciers will continue at an unprecedented speed, and impact all not only the lives of those in the Arctic, but all life entities globally. Balog (2014) is hopeful his work will create change:

What I hope people will do when they see these pictures is to understand that climate change is real. And I want them to be animated so that they can do something about it (Balog with Mesley, W., 2014)

I had similar hopes when I attended the Neil Young *Honour the Treaties Tour* in Regina on January 17, 2014, however, my observation of the audience helped me understand much more has to be done to support the Chipewyan Dene Nation and other Aboriginal communities within Canada to protect themselves and their traditional lands. In my analysis of this tour, I reflected: “Yes, people attended to hear Neil Young, but do they understand the serious reality of climate change? Do they understand Young’s allyship of Aboriginal communities and the impact of environmental racism on health and wellness outcomes of Indigenous peoples?” I am not sure. When radio announcers

and government officials alike, dismiss what Neil Young is proposing by diminishing his art or his person, this concerns me, perhaps more than it concerns him. I believe Young's "radical witnessing" of the Tar Sands has entered the realm of *Wâpamon*. Over the course of a few months, Young's mirror presented a clear reflection of his "radical witnessing" to all Canadians:

I described it as Hiroshima, which was basically pretty mellow compared to what was really going on up there. I still stand by what was said about Fort McMurray and the way it looks. Not because the houses in Fort McMurray look like Hiroshima but because Fort McMurray stands for disease that these First Nations people are getting, the pollution... everything that's happening there.

What everybody should do is try to get some information out of this and look inside themselves and try to make their own decisions for themselves as Canadians. I can't tell you what to do. For sure you can vote, but people should maybe start thinking about the future (Young in Kennedy, J., 2014, para 16).

In their own ways, the *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin* are "moral imaginers" (Senehi, 2002) and "radical witnesses" (Odora Hoppers, 2014). Odora Hoppers says, "As wounded healers, we have been radical witnesses, and therefore can speak with the authority which comes only from knowing the forms, manifestations and effects of violence. This is strength too." (Odora Hoppers, 1999, para 2). When I think back to the words, emotions and actions of the *Sisters*, I readily acknowledge the wisdoms of these women. Their "moral imaginations" (Senehi, 2002) have assisted them in their work; the belief in the "possible" is a steadfast mantra of each. The witnessing of their lifeworks, their *Storyworks*, must be shared among their kinships and the wider society, because, in

fact, they are the authorities to address the manifestations of environmental racism within their traditional lands and among their kinships. The telling of their stories in this “radical witnessing” plays a significant part in the resurgence of both their personal and kinship wellness. This advancement of witnessing can be viewed as a quest, an action, a movement, towards a knowledge of how peace is cultured and sustained.

To further this understanding of Witnessing as *Wâpamon*, I draw from the work of McCall (2013). Bussidor & Bilgen-Reinart’s (2000) collaboration in the writing of *Night Spirits* prompted McCall (2013) to critically examine the role of witnessing. In *My Story is a Gift*, she draws our attention to the critical role of the witness from both the context of an ally and the reality of the “wounded healer” (Odora Hoppers, 2014). In this narrative collection of *Night Spirits*, and through the days and nights of interviewing, transcribing and writing, two women, Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart, become comrades in the witnessing of a horrific Canadian trauma, and in the understanding of *E’thzil* (Dene for night spirits). Bussidor’s role, however, is extended, in that the testimony she and others provided for the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* constitutes in and of itself, an action which perhaps moves her role beyond that of the witnessing McCall describes. Odora Hoppers (2014), I believe, would call Ila Bussidor a “radical witness” based on the extension of her role. Nevertheless, both Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart are witnesses to the atrocities found within the relocation story of the Sayisi Dene.

In this story, McCall believes that even within the offer of an apology from the governments of Manitoba and Canada, and in the successful relocation of the Sayisi Dene to Tadoule Lake, there exists a residue among the Sayisi Dene that may never be laid to rest. Seemingly, this analysis calls for more action or reflection, and perhaps it is the

“wounded healer,” Ila Bussidor herself, who must continue to lead others in a “radical witnessing” in order for true redemption or *pimâcihiwêwin* to occur.

The concept of redemption in this coming together, within a nation-to-nation collaboration of accepting the apology and in the granting of forgiveness, may perhaps only occur once the North of 60 and Relocation Claims are settled. I believe, however, that Bussidor will continue to move forth in actions that grant her kinship a pathway to authentic healing.

It seems to me, Ila Bussidor’s role in telling the world her story is one of a “radical witness” (Odora Hoppers, 2014, personal conversation) and with her advancement of “testimonial reading” (Boler, 1999), Bussidor has helped the young people she worked with move to a place of “authentic empathy”. Her experiences with those geology students in Churchill, Manitoba is an example of Boler’s (1999) advancement of “testimonial reading” as an alternative to “passive empathy,” and an avenue to “cognitive justice” (Odora Hoppers, 1999).

Unlike it’s binary of “passive empathy” which is plied by psychological and emotional distancing, “authentic empathy” encompasses a truth within the human condition. When people experience “passive empathy”, an emotion such as pity plays a strong role, and in this experience, the “reader” becomes “positioned as a judge, evaluating the other’s experience as “serious or trivial,” and placing that person in a position of “your fault/not your fault” (Boler, 1999, p. 159). In this analysis, “Pity centrally posits the ‘other’ as a secondary object of concern, known only because of the reader’s fears about her own vulnerabilities” (Boler, 1999, p.159). So often it is this fear

of “the other” which acts as a deterrent to “authentic empathy,” sincere allyship and the offering of respect and love to those we see as different (Vanier, 2000).

In the case of Bussidor, she gifted these young people her book, her life and her soul, so they could feel the experience she had. It is my view these students moved beyond “passive empathy” to what I understand as “authentic empathy”. In this stage, a person “accepts a commitment to rethink her own assumptions, and to confront the internal obstacles encountered as one’s views are challenged” (Boler, p. 164). It is through this emotion the reader or the learner begins to recognize the constructs of power. It is in the dismantling or with the dissecting of that power, that she begins to see clearly how Indigenous peoples, for example, have been placed in the position of the “other” (LaRocque, 2010). The relationships tied to *Storywork* often bring the reader to a place of “authentic empathy” and thus, allow her to begin the journey of social justice.

Of critical importance to Ila Bussidor’s role as a “radical witness” is Boler’s (1999) reference to “testimonial reading” and its influence on “a collective educational responsibility” (p.164). This “collective educational responsibility” comes in many forms. It may in fact come from the students who worked with Bussidor at the mining camp; that remains to be seen. With respect to Ila, her family and the people of the east, I believe there are oral histories within the Sayisi Dene First Nation that need re-awakening. An awakening is a part of “radical witnessing,” as it opens doors for those in relationship to join each other in making social change.

It seems to me that my engagement as a witness to Ila’s story implies “a collective responsibility” in this search for *pimâcihiwêwin* and wellness. Although Ila Bussidor’s grandmother has passed, Betsy Anderson’s recollection of history, and in particular, her

memory of the signatory to *Treaty 5* is an important one. The misrepresentation of the people by agents of the government, along with the confusion brought by mistranslation, led the Sayisi Dene to believe they were signing a Peace Treaty in the year of 1910. This history and that of ceding traditional lands under the guise of peace, is one that must be further explored and I believe presented to researchers and curators of the Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg. In my “moral imagination,” the story of Ila’s grandmother acts as a potential redeemer of a peoples’ history. Betsy Anderson’s testimonies to her grandchildren are critical in the re-storying of this history as a part of a Canadian history. As her granddaughter, Ila Bussidor has first hand knowledge of this oral history and in the role of a “radical witness” she has an opportunity to make yet another major contribution to a human rights history. An action of this nature also gives opportunity for young people in the nation state of Canada to gain a better understanding of how *pimâcihiwêwin* can be sought. It seems with this action, a glimmer of hope may again shine for the young people and Elders of Tadoule Lake. It is this effort I offer in an acknowledgment of gratitude and through it, I hope to better understand the Indigenous principle of reciprocity.

Further to this, a “collective responsibility” is an ongoing work filled with both joys and sorrows. As “radical witnesses,” we must arm ourselves with a new thinking, a co-determination, and a cognitive justice to engage in the peace process of resurgence or *mamatowisowin*. Odora Hoppers explains her understanding of cognitive justice:

It is no longer about the pros and cons, but it is directly about the right of different forms of knowledge to survive, and survive creatively and sustainably in which the cry for self-determination meets the outer voice of co-determination.

Out of this, is born a method for exploring difference that rejects hierarchization and the attendant humiliation, and providing for reciprocity and empathy (Odora Hoppers, 2009, p. 6).

This survival of traditional knowledge is based not only on a reclaiming, such as that found in the acceptance of an existence, but rather, it is based on a return to practice for the viable and contemporary needs of Indigenous peoples. Cultural knowledge is necessary, it is public, it is cohesive and it must be shared. Odora Hoppers (2009) believes this cultural and traditional knowledge is a “cultural justice.” As she addresses the residue of colonialism found in euro-centric systems serving Indigenous peoples, she calls for an evolution of education outside western classrooms and western thinking:

...education must become a living force of change, not just for upward mobility, but to develop and strengthen these values of peace and co-existence, tolerance and spirituality (Odora Hoppers, 1999, para 3).

Her message to educators, parents, wisdom keepers and youth remains the same:

Education must confront, and be confronted with the epiphany of the ethical vacuum that is wreaking havoc with efforts towards building a democratic culture and a culture of justice and human respect (Odora Hoppers, 1999, para 3).

In support of Odora Hoppers’ call, Atleo (2011) posits an Indigenous way of life – *Hahuulism*—to outline the criticality of change, and the potentialities of holistic wellness in the wake of Indigenous spiritual knowledge and growth. He believes, “this new educational system will require a major shift from a focus upon material reality to a focus upon the different dimensions of human experience (2011, p.162) and he is sure

Indigenous knowledge systems are critical to this “enormous and difficult shift in worldview” (2011, p. 162).

The *Storywork* of the *Sisters* aids educators, Elders, parents and youth in an effort to become “radical witnesses” willing to lead in the building of a just society. In the claiming of *Wâpamon*, a multitude of possibilities exist for the kind of education that confronts injustices and harmonizes co-existence. Atleo (2011) speaks of these possibilities through the principles encompassed in *Hahuulism*. Through Indigenous thought one comes to understand the strength of collective memory, inter-relationality, sharing and wellbeing for all, and finally a restorative and cultural justice. I argue, the reflection of *Wâpamon* shows the clearness of natures’ grounding as it mirrors ancient knowings and provides clarity for new directions and in the meeting of contemporary needs. For this to occur, Odora Hoppers (2009) believes we need trust, integrity, and honesty.

Although I have focused on the story of Ila Bussidor to present an understanding of Witnessing as *Wâpamon*, all the *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyihitamowin* have stories of witnessing, testimony and redemption or *pimâcihiwêwin*. Within these stories, and within my relationship to all of the women of *Sisters*, I have joined them in the role of witness, particularly in my role of re-telling their personal stories of resistance and *Mamatowisowin* (resurgence). I am not so bold to say I am a “radical witness” but in following and in understanding Catherine Odora Hoppers’ analysis, perhaps I am close. Bishop Desmond Tutu who has given his support to women for decades, states: “Twenty five years ago people could be excused for not knowing much, or doing much, about climate change. Today we have no excuse” (Climate Reality Project, 2014). I have been

reminded, once again by Cree knowledge keeper, Joseph Naytowhow, that the spirit of *Kanawayhitowin*, is about “the action of protecting the spirit, and protecting each other *in the collective*” (personal conversation, April 20, 2014). This collective responsibility presumes the protection for one, and for all; it is about grabbing on to a moral imagination and about fully understanding radical witnessing. Seemingly, it comes from the actions that assume authentic empathy and traditional Indigenous grounding.

Conclusion

*“don’t rhyme the words too closely
when you tell our story
leave time and space for us to install
our bit of truth”*

Shelia Erickson

When I think of the *Storywork of Sisters*, the words of Vandana Shiva ring in my ears. It is she who draws my attention back to “soft power” (Vizina, 2013), soft words and a few very important questions. *What would Nature do? What should the Earth Mother do to protect a reflection humanity can see? How will the wisdom of the Sisters support educators, parents and other leaders in this quest for wellness?* Those questions are deep and the answers are embedded in the language of the land, the water, the air, the animals, the kinships and the ancestors of the *Sisters*. The answers are there and we are required to listen, to look and to feel. They are presented in circles, in knowings, in ceremony and spirit, and in oral history. Sometimes these answers are ambiguous, and as you learn from the wisdoms of the Elders, you begin to know you will not be given an immediate answer to what you must do or to what must occur. Rather, you are asked to wait, to listen, to observe and to think before you pursue dialogue and ask more

questions, and before you take action. You see in *Storywork*, there are no fast answers, no immediate conclusions; rather there is a request for continued observation, watching and witnessing. It is in these processes that one moves to a place of power, for without this witnessing there cannot be any naming, reclaiming or resurgence of Indigenous knowledge or ceremony.

When Winona LaDuke upholds the power of naming and claiming, she is, in a sense, acknowledging the critical action of witnessing and she is authenticating the words and stories shared by the women in this study. As she asks, “How does a community repair itself from the ravages of the past?” (LaDuke, 2005, p. 12), I ponder those ravages, which I believe play out in the current realities of many kinships and I think about the youth of today. Like many the many Indigenous knowledge keepers in this study, Hart (2010) draws my attention once again to the continued “blinding” of and the “sacrificing of Indigenous worldviews and values for norms outside traditional cultural aims” (Henderson, 2000, p. 59), those norms which seemingly negate the health of young peoples and the lands that sustain them:

For most Aboriginal students, the realization of their invisibility is similar to looking into a still lake and not seeing their image” (Henderson, 2000, p. 76). Indeed, Eurocentric thought has come to mediate the entire world to the point where worldviews that differ from Eurocentric thought are relegated to the periphery, if they are acknowledged at all (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Blaut, 1993 in Hart, 2010, p.4).

In this conclusion, I argue today’s Indigenous youth need recognition, encouragement and support to counter “invisibility” so they too may engage in the experience of

Wâpamon as witnessing. In countering the western mirror (Odora Hoppers, 2009), *Wâpamon* may help young people envision their true identities; these found in the reflections of their ancestors, in the vitality of their imaginations, and in the *conscientization* of their thoughts and actions, through the engagement of land living and practice of their languages, traditions and ceremonies. It is here they will find the necessary steps to create social and ecological change. In her “*Recovering of the Sacred*,” LaDuke (2005) demands we engage in a multifaceted and intergenerational actions which preserve the cultural significance of Indigenous knowledge and most importantly, within that process, she demands our obligation to provide space to Indigenous voices as all define what is necessary for sustainability, dignity and liberation.

In LaDuke’s examination of the “sacred” (2005) she explores not only the “lands” of that concept, but she upholds the “bodies” of Indigenous peoples as sacred entities that need defined spaces and conditions to heal and to be able to reclaim and practice traditional knowledge and ceremony, within the leadership of themselves and others. The *Storywork* of each *Sister* has contributed greatly to the naming and reclaiming of histories in specific territories within the boundaries defined as Canada. From its gendered Indigenous position, this *Storywork* calls to the Elders and the youth for their collaborative thoughts and actions. It has been offered in an attempt to “recover the sacred” from the reality of environmental racism.

Elder Stella Blackbird asks us to consider this while on our paths:

I promote natural medicine and try to promote holistic, healthy minds. You must think about spirituality, mental and physical wellness. I would ask you, when you go to bed, to examine that. You are not in balance if you haven’t dealt with it all.

I acknowledge her wisdom and I thank her for bringing me to this work, and for giving me the opportunity to be in relationship with the *Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin*.

As I depart, I leave you with the words of this wisdom keeper: “Years ago I fasted for 20 days and my gifts were coming from the Creator and in working with the government” (Blackbird, 2012, personal conversation).

This vision said,

Let us pray in our own ways. Let us educate ourselves in our own way.

Let us be ourselves as a people. Let us be part of our land and let us feel that freedom that is within us, with all our gifts to share.

I have this written somewhere; it sums it up. (Elder Stella Blackbird)

I look forward to the next step in this journey and as I acknowledge all the wisdom keepers who have guided me in this process, I pay special thanks to my advisor Dr. Charlotte Enns, and my committee members, Dr. Laara Fitznor, Dr. Jessica Senehi and Dr. Alexandria Wilson. As I proceed, I will remember the circle of Indigenous knowledges found in the *Storywork of Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin*. Within the four directions of knowing, I will continue to honour the wisdoms of my *Sisters*, Marie Adam, Stella Blackbird, Ila Bussidor, Tammy Cook-Searson, Rose Richardson, Joan Scottie, Yvonne Vizina and Jennifer Watkins. Many blessings and good energy to all. *Marci!*

***Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.***

Arundhati Roy

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Letterhead – Research Study Questions for the Principal Researcher

Sisters of *Sāsīpihkēyihtamowin* - Wise Women of the Cree, Denesuliné, Inuit and Métis: Understandings of Storywork, Traditional Knowledges and Eco-justice among Indigenous Women Leaders

Thesis question:

How are Indigenous woman in Canada using leadership and healing to address environmental racism and ecological destruction found within traditional territories?

Sub questions:

- 1) How is environmental racism displaying itself in communities?
- 2) How are traditional lands influenced by ecological destruction?
- 3) How are Indigenous women's actions influencing the children and youth of their communities?
- 4) How are Indigenous women's actions influencing educators and school cultures?
- 5) What future directives are provided by Indigenous women in Canada for policy development and curricula evolution in the areas of eco-literacy, environmental justice and peace education?

APPENDIX B

Institutional Letterhead – Questionnaire A (Participant’s written responses)

Sisters of *Sāsīpihkēyihitamowin* - Wise Women of the Cree, Denesuliné, Inuit and Métis: Understandings of Storywork, Traditional Knowledges and Eco-justice among Indigenous Women Leaders

Procedure for Open-ended Questionnaire:

You may answer all or some of the questions.

Please take your time.

If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions and would prefer to move to the next question please do so.

1. Were you familiar with the term environmental racism before the invitation to participate in this study?
2. If you believe environmental racism is displaying itself in your community could you comment on how that is occurring?
3. Are your traditional lands healthy or are they being negatively impacted by industries and development?
4. Are the ecosystems of your traditional lands being destroyed?
5. Are your kinships and your youth healthy? If not, what do you believe is the root cause of illness or poor health?

6. How are you, as an Indigenous woman in Canada, using leadership and healing to address environmental racism and ecological destruction found within your traditional territory?
7. How are your actions influencing the children and youth of your community?
8. How are your actions influencing educators?
9. Are your actions being resisted? If so, by whom or what?
10. What future directives can you provide for your kinship, community, governments or schools?

APPENDIX C

Institutional Letterhead – Questionnaire B (Participant’s written responses)

Sisters of *Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin* - Wise Women of the Cree, Denesuliné, Inuit and Métis: Understandings of Storywork, Traditional Knowledges and Eco-justice among Indigenous Women Leaders

Open-ended Questionnaire:

You may answer all or any of the questions.

Please take your time.

If you feel uncomfortable with any of the questions and would prefer to move to the next question please do so.

1. Upon reflecting on your life history and activism, could you comment on any changes you have made in the last month?
2. Are you now more sensitive to issues of racism or to the negative impacts found within your traditional lands?
3. If you believe environmental racism is displaying itself in your community what will you do?
4. What is the single most important factor or action that you may engage in to positively influence the youth of your community?
5. If your actions are resisted, how will you sustain yourself, your family and your kinship?
6. Are your actions reflective of the seventh generation teachings?

APPENDIX D

Institutional Letterhead – Participant Guide for Storywork

Sisters of *Sāsīpihkēyīhtamowin* - Wise Women of the Cree, Denesuliné, Inuit and Métis: Understandings of Storywork, Traditional Knowledges and Eco-justice among Indigenous Women Leaders

Please reflect upon the below questions for your Storywork Interview.

The researcher will ask these questions when she interviews you:

1. Could you provide a story from a memory of your childhood or youth that relates to leadership and indicates how this experience influenced who you are today?
2. What do you think of when you believe “that a woman is a leader”?
3. How does your identity as an Indigenous woman influence your leadership and consequent actions in respect to the protection of traditional Indigenous lands and the kinships of these lands?
4. How does your leadership influence the wellness of your community?
5. Do you see injustice or environmental racism in your community and if you do, how do you address this?
6. What have you learned from other community leaders, teachers and healers that help you create positive change for the youth of today?

OPTIONAL: Read the following sections for reflection. Think about these topics when the researcher is interviewing you.

If you wish, you may write a story about your life based on the following sections. These questions should be used as a guide only. You may refer to one or more of the sections to provide your personal narrative or Storywork.

Section I: Childhood and Youth

Could you provide a story about your childhood? Where were you born? Where did you spend your childhood? Who were the important persons in your life? What did you learn from your parents, your grandparents and other elders around you? What experiences were the most joyful? Which experiences hurt you? How did your years of education influence you? Which teachers and other community members helped or hindered your capacity for spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical growth? How did they do this? What did you hide from others as you were growing up? What did you share? What have you learned from your childhood and adolescent years that could help other children and youth today?

Section II: Identity and Leadership

How did you become a leader? What did you do to recognize your distinct identity and reclaim it? Do you ground yourself in that identity when you are engaged in a leadership and healing role? How do you do this? What do you do to revitalize your spirit, mind and body? Who are you now? Are you a mother, a grandmother, a partner? Do you have a relationship with the Creator and the land? Does this relationship have a role in the decisions you make? Explain your relationship.

Section III: Wellness and Injustice

How do you see wellness? What is it? What is peace? How do you see the children and women in your communities today? Have they changed from children that you once knew? Are they healthy? Are their identities intact? Do you see injustice? How do you uncover injustice when it is hidden? What angers you? What do you do when you become angry? What do you do as a healer and a woman of eco-justice?

Section IV: Community Lessons and Future Vision

What have you learned from other community leaders, teachers and other healers? What can you teach them? What are your wishes for the children you know? How do you envision the role of women as leaders and healers? How will you be a mentor for other women? How can you help these women protect and help children to develop and grow into healthy and caring adults? What can men learn from you? What must men learn from you? Can you identify examples of current social and ecological chaos in your community? How is this chaos re-enforced? What must be done to stop the current sociological and ecological chaos found in many communities? What must be done in schools and in communities to address issues of marginalization and despair that are implicated by environmental racism?

APPENDIX E

Institutional Letterhead – Correspondence to Potential Participants

Date

Address of Participant

Dear Participant:

My name is Margaret Kress White and I am a doctoral student from the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. I am writing to invite you to participate in a dissertation research study.

My study focuses on how environmental racism and ecological destruction presents itself in your traditional territories and how you have addressed this form of racism through your actions and leadership. Additionally, this study will look at the role of Indigenous women leaders as they search for kinship and life entity sustainability and wellness.

Participating in this study means that you will:

1. Review the research study guide (30 minutes) and finalize your acceptance to participate in this study (based on your oral agreement);
2. Mail consent forms back to the researcher within two weeks of your oral agreement to participate (with the self addressed envelop);
3. Participate in a questionnaire process that includes Questionnaire A and Questionnaire B (optional). (Estimated time - 60 minutes and 30 minutes).
4. Mail Questionnaire A with the self addressed envelop to the researcher (within one month of consent);

5. Mail Questionnaire B with the self addressed envelop to the researcher (within three months of consent);
6. Review storywork guide and choose one or more options for participation:
 - a) reflect on a story that defines your history, activism or leadership so you may prepare for an interview with the researcher;
 - b) submit a two page written story based on ancestral teachings or activism
7. Participate in one 60-minute digitally audiotaped and or videotaped interview with the researcher at a time and place convenient to the participant (within two months of consent);
8. Spend approximately 60 minutes reviewing the interview transcripts;
9. Respond to the the principal researcher with validation of interview transcripts (ensures your words, language and nuances are recorded accurately)
10. Call researcher by November 15, 2012 should you wish to draw attention to or make changes to your responses within Questionnaires, Storywork or Interview.

Research Project Title:

Sisters of Sāsīpīhkēyihtamowin - Wise Women of the Cree, Denesuliné, Inuit and Métis: Understandings of Storywork, Traditional Knowledges and Eco-justice among Indigenous Women Leaders

Researcher: Margaret Kress White, University of Manitoba

Advisor: Dr. Charlotte Enns

Research Timeline: August 2012 – November 2012

I am looking for Aboriginal women leaders who are motivated and willing to engage critically about their leadership and healing practices, specifically as they relate to (a) understandings of environmental racism as affecting traditional territories and peoples (b) understandings of eco-justice and healing or peace actions. The relevant literature reinforces the need for Aboriginal women leaders, Elders, chiefs, and traditional healers

to engage in reflective practice in order to lead kinships and communities in the protections of traditional lands, kinship sustainability and environmental wellness.

I have attached the background information and consent form to this mail which details the parameters of the study, your right to withdraw at any time, and other issues pertaining to the your participation.

A copy of this thesis will be shared with you so you may subsequently share this with your kinship and community. It may also be presented in the form of scholarly publications and/or local or national conference presentations which are intended to contribute to a knowledge base about the ecological justice conceptualizations that influence the decision of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal governments, educators, community members and youth.

Once again, your participation is voluntary. Should you wish to participate, please sign the consent that is attached to this mail and return it to me with the self-declaration form at the contact information provided below. If you do not wish to participate, please discard this information.

Sincerely,

Margaret Kress White
University of Manitoba

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

APPENDIX F

Institutional Letterhead – Background Information on the Study

Background of principal researcher, Margaret Kress White:

As a child, I lived in the south grasslands of Saskatchewan. My mother showed me how joy in learning comes from people and nature. I smile a wide smile when I think about my mother as teacher. When I attended Billimun School in the middle of the prairies, I was one of her grade two students. Over the years I have lived, studied and worked in Mankota, the place of my birth, Val Marie, Swift Current, Saskatoon, Winnipeg and Denare Beach, the place of my re-birth and summer home. I have studied at SIAST and the Universities of Manitoba and Saskatchewan and I hold graduate and undergraduate degrees in Recreation Studies and Education. My lived experiences have helped me advance the epistemologies of inclusive and special education, human rights law, ethics, critical disability theory, eco-literacy and Indigenous knowledge within teacher education programs and beyond. I have held many instrumental employment roles including that of recreation director, community school coordinator, recreation therapist, and of course teacher for a variety of elementary, secondary and post-secondary students. As a sessional instructor for the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Saskatchewan and NORTEP (Northern Teacher Education Program) I have been able to experience the needs of beginner teachers and I have worked to hear all voices. My role as an advocate for and with disabled peoples and Aboriginal peoples has helped me gain a foundation grounded within the Indigenous principle of relationality. Recently, I have worked in the role of researcher and consultant as I completed a review of special education services for the Prince Albert Grand Council. In this process I found and embraced the complexity of knowledges within teaching professionals and Aboriginal parents. The importance of listening and hearing all voices within the delivery of education is a necessary and important aspect within teacher education programs. I currently work as an Academic Advisor at SIAST in Human Services and Early Childhood Education and am an active member of two cohorts within my Ph.D. program at the University of Manitoba.

My life as a teacher and a scholar has evolved in the past fifteen years. I am sure that even before that, “I was teacher”; the elders at Shawane Dagošiwīn say “everything you know you are born with” (2010). When I think of this, I rely on my relationships, those of my Métis, French, German and English ancestors and the “teachers” I have had to bring life lessons to my own students. My life path is about teaching and scholarship, and through my current research and community work, I strive to help those who lead and teach develop the kind of sensibilities that stir a compassionate love for children of all nations. I believe that every child has the potential to bring something valued and unique to her kinship and community, and I recognize the need for educators and community leaders to help every child see his or her beauty. An inclusive philosophy, clear curriculum objectives, defined and creative methodologies and equitable assessments supported by current and relevant resources are essential pillars within all educational systems and specifically, within teacher education and community services. Most importantly, and in each component of study, I find it absolutely essential to help students see how children and young people must grab on to the confidence and courage

necessary to be joyful and engaged learners, and further what they, as beginner teachers and community leaders, can do to enhance this phenomenon. In this exploring, I seek to help students know why principles of justice and equality are more than the legalese we see in the courtrooms and classrooms of our nation, and why researchers and educators advancing these principles need “storywork” that takes them beyond human rights discourses and testimonial references as they help their students “see.” I strive to embrace the lived experiences of peoples who have been marginalized and I have learned it is about “showing” rather than telling. When teaching others about educational philosophy, curriculum design, assessment and adaptations, I help students see how the recognition of and learning from multiple perspectives and “ways of knowing” are critical components within the journey of becoming an effective and compassionate teacher and leader. It is as much about teamwork and learning to be “with” as it is about me showing students how one can go about seeking peace while exposing injustice. It is about helping students understand how offering a safe space for “voice” within their classrooms is a lifelong learning process that requires much reflection and diligent activism. It is about learning and growing together.

As I see many Indigenous women and children who continue to be shut down by hegemonic systems and colonized leadership, I believe my role as teacher, ally, and partner can make a difference. My quest to learn about and share the collective and healing knowledges of Indigenous women has been the focus of my current research. Guided by the foundation of *Sāsīpihkēyihtamowin*, the Cree word for resilience, I seek to explore correlations among environmental racism and quality of life determinates for Indigenous peoples and its antidote, Indigenous women’s knowledge. My research supports Indigenous women leaders as they examine ecological justice, traditional healing, and peace education. It is important for students in post-secondary education programs to see that the one who teaches them is also a learner. I believe that teaching and learning are fully integrated conceptions, and like Paulo Freire, I believe “there is no teaching without learning” (Freire, 1998). Like bell hooks, I know the passion and love that one brings to the classroom will multiply among teacher educators, community leaders and their students and youth. Helping each person gain and maintain respect for themselves and others, and for all earth entities and Mother Earth are critical components of my life work. I strive to follow the seven sacred laws that exist as the “eternal natural law” of the Anishinaabe and other Aboriginal peoples—respect, love, truth, kindness, courage, wisdom and humility—as I bring my knowledge to others.

I gratefully acknowledge the guidance and wisdoms of Cree Elder and Medicine Woman Stella Blackbird as I do my own parents, Florence and Peter Kress. I thank my children, Andrew, Robin and Mackenzie, as I embrace the lesson of parent who is teacher. The many life lessons I have gained from each of these “teachers” have given me the courage to be a creative ally, partner and educator. I heed the words of Louis Riel and those of my Métis ancestors:

My people will sleep for one hundred years when they awake, it will be the artists [and the teachers] who give them their spirit back.

Definitions of Environmental Racism

Environmental racism is defined as the **implementation of environmental, natural resource, and development schemes that nullify or impair the enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous Peoples. This new form of environmental discrimination is an assault on Indigenous Peoples' human rights and public health including their right to their unique special social, cultural, spiritual and historical life ways and worldviews. Environmental racism results in the devastation, contamination, dispossession, loss or denial of access to Indigenous peoples' biodiversity, their waters, and traditional lands and territories. Environmental racism is now the primary cause of human health effects of Indigenous Peoples and the forced separation and removal of Indigenous Peoples from their lands and territories, their major means of subsistence, their language culture and spirituality all of which are derived from their cultural, physical and spiritual relationship to their land.**

International Indian Treaty Council, 2008, Para 6.

Environmental racism both in North America and elsewhere, is the practice of viewing minority communities as a means to the majorities' ends, and of burdening the disempowered with what no one else is prepared to accept, or to further the economic success of some at the expense of the weak, the poor and the disempowered.

Laura Westra, 1996, p.63.

Environmental racism refers to any policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities because of their race or color. Environmental racism in public policies and industry practices results in benefits being provided to whites and costs being shifted to people of color. Environmental racism is reinforced by government, legal, economic, political and military institutions.

Robert Bullard, 2005, p.32.

Principles of Environmental Justice

WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)

- 1) Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- 2) Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
- 3) Environmental Justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
- 4) Environmental Justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
- 5) Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self- determination of all peoples.
- 6) Environmental Justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
- 7) Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision- making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
- 8) Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.

9) Environmental Justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.

10) Environmental Justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

11) Environmental Justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.

12) Environmental Justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13) Environmental Justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14) Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.

15) Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16) Environmental Justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17) Environmental Justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

More info on environmental justice and environmental racism can be found online at www.ejnet.org/ej/

Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted these 17 principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, the Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.

Earth Democracy: Ten Principles of Justice, Sustainability and Peace

1. Ecological Democracy - Democracy of all life

We are all members of the Earth community. We all have the duty to protect the rights and welfare of all species and all people. No humans have the right to encroach on the ecological space of other species and other people, or treat them with cruelty and violence.

2. Intrinsic worth of all Species and Peoples

All species, humans and cultures have intrinsic worth. They are subjects, not objects of manipulation or ownership. No humans have the right to own other species, other people or the knowledge of other cultures through patents and other intellectual property rights.

3. Diversity in Nature and Culture

Defending biological and cultural diversity is a duty of all people. Diversity is an end in itself, a value, a source of richness both material and cultural.

4. Natural Rights to Sustenance

All members of the Earth Community including all humans have the right to sustenance -- to food and water, to safe and clean habitat, to security of ecological space. These rights are natural rights, they are birthrights given by the fact of existence on earth and are best protected through community rights and commons. They are not given by states or corporations, nor can they be extinguished by state or corporate action. No state or corporation has the right to erode or undermine these natural rights or enclose the commons that sustain all through privatisation or monopoly control.

5. Earth Economy is based on Economic Democracy and Living Economy

Earth democracy is based on economic democracy. Economic systems in Earth Democracy protect ecosystems and their integrity; they protect people's livelihoods and provide basic needs to all. In the earth economy there are no disposable or dispensable species or people. The earth economy is a living economy. It is based on sustainable, diverse, pluralistic systems that protect nature and people, are chosen by people, for the benefit of the common good.

6. Living Economies are built on Local Economies

Conservation of the earth's resources and creation of sustainable and satisfying livelihoods is most caringly, creatively and efficiently and equitably achieved at the local level. Localization of economics is social and ecological imperative. Only goods and services that cannot be produced locally, using local resources, local knowledge should be produced non-locally and traded long distance. Earth democracy is based on vibrant, resilient local economies, which support national and global economies. The global economy does not crush and destroy local economies.

7. Living Democracy

Earth democracy is based on local living democracy with local communities, organised on principles of inclusion and diversity and ecological and social responsibility having the highest authority on decisions related to the environment and natural resources and to the sustenance and livelihoods of people. Authority is delegated to more distant levels of governance on the principle of subsidiarity. Earth democracy is living democracy.

8. Living Knowledge

Earth democracy is based on earth centered and community centered knowledge systems. Living knowledge is knowledge that maintains and renews living processes and contributes to health of the planet and people. It is also living knowledge in that it is embedded in nature and society, is not abstract, reductionist and anti-life. Living knowledge is a commons, it belongs collectively to communities that create it and keep it alive. All humans have a duty to share knowledge. No person or corporation has a right to enclose monopolize patent or exclusively own as intellectual property living knowledge.

9. Balancing Rights with Responsibility

In earth democracy, rights are derived from and balanced with responsibility. Those who bear the consequences of decisions and actions are the decision makers.

10. Globalizing Peace, Care and Compassion

Earth democracy connects people in circles of care, cooperation and compassion instead of dividing them through competition and conflict. Earth democracy globalizes compassion, not greed, and peace, not war.

APPENDIX G

Institutional Letterhead – Informed Consent

Research Project Title:

Sisters of Sāsīpihkēyihtamowin - Wise Women of the Cree, Denesuliné, Inuit and Métis: Understandings of Storywork, Traditional Knowledges and Eco-justice among Indigenous Women Leaders

Principal Investigator and contact information: Margaret Kress White

Research Supervisor and contact information: Dr. Charlotte Enns

This background information is part of the process of informed consent. It will give you an overview of what the research is about and what your participation will involve.

If you require more detail about something mentioned in this research process or if you believe there is information not included, feel free to ask the Principal Investigator.

Your attention and careful reading of the documents in this research study is appreciated.

Purpose and Focus of the Research

The purpose of this research study will investigate the characteristics, actions and directives of eight to ten Indigenous women as they confront the realities of environmental racism and lead youth, families, kinships and communities in the work of healing and ecological justice.

The life works of these women will be investigated to look for peace and justice initiatives that disrupt environmental racism and follow similar patterns of activism. Their leadership styles will be explored. Each will have the opportunity to reflect upon and provide the stories that shaped their present stance. Their histories and their family histories will be queried. How their current roles of leadership influence community, family and individual wellness will be explored. How these four women see themselves, whether they are peace activists, educators, social justice instigators, is an important part of the vision I wish to explore. Their resilience, through the recognition and reclaiming of their Indigenous identities is an important consideration.

The methodology of this research project includes the development of a questionnaire for written submission, a summarization of the responses to be shared among the

participants, and a final questionnaire submission asking for additional directives. Each participant will be asked the same questions in a formal written questionnaire, Questionnaire A. The researcher will share a summary of the questionnaire responses a month after the initial questionnaire submission. Each participant will have the opportunity to review the collective summary responses. Should they wish to expand upon their initial directives by submitting Questionnaire B, they will find an enclosed written submission form.

The Storywork will consist of a reflective guide so each participant may take the time to reflect upon her life history to choose and share the life story she sees as most critical to this research. The researcher will conduct a personal interview with each participant. This semi-structured interview will have several questions, however, the nature of storywork may lead the researcher to ask additional questions. Individual interviews with participants will be conducted over a four-month period and transcripts will be provided to each member for the validation of their responses. If possible, individual interviews for the Storywork will be conducted in the home communities of the participants. The members and myself will determine whether these interviews will be done in person, or through telephone conversation and/or Skype. Notes and tapes from these sessions will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office.

I will be meeting with my advisor, Charlotte Enns and/or Indigenous committee member, Laara Fitznor or Alex Wilson, to discuss the progress of this project on a weekly basis. Copies of the completed dissertation will be presented to all participants and committee members upon conclusion of the work.

1. Participation Commitment

Participating in this study means that you consent to the following:

1. Review the research study guide (30 minutes) and finalize your acceptance to participate in this study (based on your oral agreement);
2. Mail consent forms back to the researcher within two weeks of your oral agreement to participate (with the self addressed envelop);
3. Participate in a questionnaire process that includes Questionnaire A and Questionnaire B (optional). (Estimated time - 60 minutes and 30 minutes).
4. Mail Questionnaire A with the self addressed envelop to the researcher (within one month of consent);

5. Mail Questionnaire B with the self addressed envelop to the researcher (within three months of consent);
6. Review storywork guide and choose one or more options for participation:
 - a) reflect on a story that defines your history, activism or leadership so you may prepare for an interview with the researcher;
 - b) submit a two page written story based on ancestral teachings or activism
7. Participate in one 60-minute digitally audiotaped and or videotaped interview with the researcher at a time and place convenient to the participant (within two months of consent);
8. Spend approximately 60 minutes reviewing the interview transcripts;
9. Respond to the the principal researcher with validation of interview transcripts (ensures your words, language and nuances are recorded accurately)
10. Call researcher by November 15, 2012 should you wish to draw attention to or make changes to your responses within Questionnaires, Storywork or Interview.

2. Research Instruments

The instruments used in this research project include two questionnaires, Questionnaire A (primary) and Questionnaire B (follow-up), Storywork Guide, audio or video recordings of Storywork interview, transcribed interview, photographs, cultural maps, field notes and memos. The questionnaires and Storywork Guide (for oral and written responses) will be provided to the participants at the onset of the study. Should participants wish to contribute photographs or cultural maps for a collective data source of knowledges regarding traditional lands, environmental racism and ecological destructions, they may do so.

3. Study Subjects

Participants selected for this study will include Indigenous adult women from traditional territories in Canada and four distinct Aboriginal Nations. Participants of this study will have leadership experiences with peace initiatives, political education, school cultures, environmental movements and/or healing from traditional perspectives. The members selected will be women with diverse ages, experiences and educational backgrounds.

4. Informed Consent

The nature of this research study will be provided to each participant in writing along with the letter of consent. Initially, potential participants selected for this study will be contacted by telephone. During this telephone call, I will explain who I am and my interest in conducting this research and how I came to choose them as potential members of this research study. If members are interested in participating in the study, I will send each woman a letter of consent and a guided research package. The research package will include a background document defining the questions of the research study, the definition of environmental racism as found within Indigenous communities, the questionnaires and the Storywork Guide. All documents will utilize University of Manitoba letterhead to confirm the legitimacy of the study.

Each member will be asked to self-identify, as this is an important feature within all Indigenous research. Additionally, each member may potentially know who the other members are within this study. At the onset of the research study, each member will be asked to share her name, her voice and her stories with others. Each participant will be asked to give consent to a participant list and contact information so she can gain support from the other Aboriginal women in the study should she wish to do so. This process is utilized to ensure transparency and continuous long-term support for each of the Indigenous women in this research study.

All participants will be given the option to withdraw from the study if they choose to do so.

Participation protocols among Indigenous peoples are required to proceed in this study. The researcher ensures meeting the principle of reciprocity by offering of a gift such as tobacco and cloth or tea (dependent on Indigenous protocols) for each member as well as extending my personal thanks.

5. Deception

There is no deception within this study.

6. Feedback/Debriefing

After each interview, the researcher will send the transcribed document, notes, and audiotape or videotape to each participant to ensure verification for accuracy. You will have the opportunity to review the transcripts from your Storywork interview in order to add, delete, or change responses and to ensure that all identifying information is recorded in the manner you have agreed to. It is anticipated that it will take you approximately 60 minutes to review the transcript. You will have two weeks to review the transcript and then the researcher will proceed with the analysis. In cases of non-responses, the researcher will follow-up with a telephone call to each non-responding participant for an oral approval of the transcript. As this research study supports collaboration, each participant will be given ongoing opportunities to validate personal data. The researcher will be available to each participant should she wish to speak about her responses in the Questionnaires or the Storywork Interview.

All participants will receive the data by email or regular mail, in the manner they select with the researcher. All email correspondence containing data will be password protected and other hard correspondence will be locked in the researcher's office file cabinet.

To conclude the study, I will provide each participant with a copy of my dissertation and in my thanks, I will indicate my willingness to support their communities with a presentation of the results. I believe by honouring the principle of reciprocity, I will sustain my relationality with the participants. I believe this study will influence all of my future life work. Marci.

7. Risks and Benefits

It is possible each member may encounter some emotional trauma with the telling of her personal story. As these participants will potentially know the other participants within the research study, the researcher believes they must have access to each other for support. This access creates a collective of "strong women voices" and a potential network to support futuristic Indigenous research. This process not only allows the Indigenous women in the study the opportunity to speak with the researcher and each other, it gives a needed and protective space for their individual and collective truths. The evolution of this study seeks to maintain the Indigenous principle of relationality. As each woman involved in the study, including the researcher, has Indigenous ties and relationality, it is a critically needed system of Indigenous networking available for support and de-briefing.

8. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Although each member of the study will ultimately be given the option to maintain aspects of anonymity and confidentiality within the study and the writing of the

dissertation, each participant will be advised on the importance and necessity of self-identification within Indigenous research methodologies. Storywork holds validity by its authentic membership and positionality. The investigation of the demise of Aboriginal culture and knowledge within traditional lands requires each participant to lend her voice and leadership through the stating, claiming or re-claiming of identity.

Participants may choose to answer only those questions (Questionnaire A; Questionnaire B) with which they feel comfortable, and they have significant flexibility and choice regarding the Storywork they wish to share. That being said, those who request their quotes and the location of these inclusions to remain anonymous will be honoured.

At the onset of the research study, each member will be asked to share her name, her voice and her stories with others in the study. Each participant will be asked to give consent to a participant list and contact information so she can gain support from the other Aboriginal women in the study should she wish to do so, and so they in return may contact her. This process is utilized to ensure transparency and the continuous long-term support for each of the Indigenous women in this research study. The opportunity for relationship building and support is a stronghold of Aboriginal relationality and self-determination among Indigenous peoples.

During the research study, access to the collective data and materials will be limited to the researcher and potentially the researcher's advisor and committee members. Should the researcher elect to use a transcription service, both the researcher and the transcriber will sign a confidentiality agreement.

Participants may withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher. Should withdrawal occur, all corresponding data will be destroyed.

9. Dissemination

To conclude the study, I will provide each participant with a copy of my dissertation. Results of this study may also be presented in the form of scholarly publications and/or local, national or international conference presentations which are intended to contribute to a knowledge base about environmental racism and ecological justice for Aboriginal Elders, members and youth, and also for non-Aboriginal governments, educators, community members and youth.

10. Compensation

There will be no financial compensation associated with this study.

At any point you may withdraw from this study by contacting the principal researcher at which time your data will be destroyed.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management / Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If there are any concerns or complaints about this project contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122, or email margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher Signature _____ Date _____

-
- I would like to receive a paper summary copy of the results of this study. **OR**
- I would like to receive an electronic summary copy of the results of this study, forwarded to the following address:

PARTICIPANT SELF-DECLARATION FORM

This information will be shared with the PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER and the PARTICIPANTS of this research study.

NAME

NATION

TRADITIONAL HOMELAND

CURRENT HOMELAND

LEADERSHIP ROLE

PHONE NUMBER

EMAIL

ADDRESS: P.O.BOX NUMBER,
COMMUNITY, PROVINCE OR
TERRITORY, POSTAL CODE

WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS
RESEARCH STUDY?

Please return this Self-Declaration form to the researcher with a signed copy of the INFORMED CONSENT .