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(Re)Positioning the Indigenous Academic Researcher: A Journey of Critical Reflexive Understanding and Storytelling

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Abstract

This article aims to explore, (de)construct, (re)affirm and (re)position my experiences in Indigenous-centred research through an Indigenous lens. Specifically, I look to highlight my experiences as a fourth-year undergraduate student who undertook a two-month Indigenous-centred research journey in Peru. This writing is an examination of my research processes to determine if I was able to maintain integrity with ethical Indigenous research practices and protocols, as outlined in my initial project proposal. As part of this reflection, I will explore how the qualitative methods of a critical Indigenous ethnography (re)positions research through the re-conceptualisation of these methods as natural configurations of Indigenous epistemologies and methodologies. Indigenous epistemologies encompass the same relational, political and storytelling processes described in critical, reflexive and auto-ethnographic research. Storytelling has been said to blur the discursive lines of research traditions, and as an Indigenous researcher, I believe I have a responsibility to share this story.

Introduction

If writing is a form of storytelling, then let me tell you a story. Writing from a space that strategically mingles my reflexive narrative wanderings with academic prose, I exist on the margins, outside the margins, and perhaps without a clearly defined margin. This article aims to explore, (de)construct, (re)affirm and (re)position my experiences in Indigenous-centred research through an Indigenous lens. The lens represents an Indigenous epistemology that is (in)formed by Indigenous worldviews, perspectives, beliefs, practices and protocols— epistemology that represents ways of knowing, being and doing that are as much an individual knowledge process as they are a collective, Indigenous experience of lived realities (Brant-Castellano 2000; Martin and Mirraabooa 2003; Wilson 2001).

Specifically, I look to highlight my experiences as a fourth-year undergraduate student who undertook a two-month Indigenous-centred research journey in the Andean village of Patacancha, Peru. The primary intention of the research was to learn about Quechua women's traditional craftwork, specifically their beautiful back strip loom textile weaving, and to contrast this engagement with my own experiences as an Indigenous First Nations woman and crafter from Ontario, Canada. I aimed to explore the possible parallels between the 'North' and 'South' in terms of traditional practices upheld in women's craftwork as a way to preserve Indigenous culture in postcolonial times.

With the experiential component of the research completed, an examination of my research processes—to determine if I was able to maintain integrity to the ethical standards as outlined in my research proposal—is a necessary undertaking.

As part of this reflection, I will explore how the qualitative methods of a critical Indigenous ethnography (re)positions research through the re-conceptualisation of these methods as natural configurations of Indigenous methodologies which form an Indigenous research paradigm—reconfigurations that challenge Western-dominated research agendas by creating space and advocating for self-determined Indigenous epistemologies, methodologies and representation. This writing represents an ongoing journey of critical reflexive understanding and of exploring the contradiction of contesting positionalities that may arise as an Indigenous researcher in foreign Native lands. This is my inquiry, but more so, this is part of my story.

A story of the West, from the North and towards the South

I want to begin this writing with an examination of the processes, theories, local and global contexts that underpin my research experience in Peru, yet, at the same time, continually impact on my research journey in the present. A natural start to this wandering is an analysis of how Indigenous knowledges, and thus Indigenous research processes, exist in the 'West'. One of the most prolific Indigenous scholars of this generation to have so clearly, sharply and poignantly defined Indigenous peoples' contested, complex and self-determined relationship with research is Maori writer Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) in her seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Smith writes about the histories of colonialism and imperialism as the mechanisms and tools of oppressive social structures that have, and continue to have, negative impacts on Indigenous realities, while subjugating Indigenous knowledges. Smith describes how modernity has fostered the development of rational, scientific exploration and the 'discovery of' by Europeans, which took the form of trade expansionism, 'the establishment of colonies, and the systemic colonization of Indigenous peoples' (Smith 1999: 59). Andean scholar Eduardo Grillo Fernandez (1998: 194) describes the dangerous nature of imperialism when he notes, 'the modern Western world, capitalist society, is the world of competition in which the human person is reduced to the individual—a product of the alienating disaggregation of the community'. Furthermore, he writes:

... economics postulates the absolute primacy of the global market in human relations. In this way imperialism is facilitated—an imperialism that exercises full hegemony in the global market and that administers the whole planet according to its whim, submitting the world to a single order imposed by it (1998: 206).

In this sense, the West is a social, political and economic power that represents a predominately white European lens through which the world is filtered and power is exerted. The West is the normative, hegemonic and historical breeding ground for colonisation and contemporary imperialism.

Mi'kmaw educator Marie Battiste (2002) describes the Eurocentricity of how knowledge is constructed, supported and propagated by and from the West as a form of cognitive imperialism. Indigenous scholars like Smith (1999) have been 'writing back' and 'talking back' to the West as a necessary counter-discourse to the Eurowestern hegemony of knowledge creation and construction (Menzies 2001). Literature that speaks to the need for decolonising knowledge and research processes—as well as deconstruction

of how knowledge is defined, rejected and protected through Western imperialism and colonialism—have been sites for analysis, action and resistance across numerous academic disciplines, including social work, education, geography, anthropology and sociology (Apffel-Marglin 1998; Hodge and Lester 2006; Jankie 2004; Jones and Jenkins 2008; Kanuha 2000; Konai Helu 2003; Kovach 2005, 2009; Menzies 2001; Sefa Dei 2000; Sinclair 2004; Smith 1999; Weaver 2000). In research contexts, decolonising research means the (re)centering of Indigenous knowledges, ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies as central to research processes (Kovach 2009; Martin and Mirraboopa 2003; Smith 1999; Wilson 2001). Indigenous-centred research is process-oriented, relational, spiritually-mindful and cognizant of ethical practices and protocols that are guided by individual, community and commonly-held Indigenous values and beliefs (Apffel-Marglin 1998; Brant-Castellano 2000; Baskin 2005; Walker 2001). A decolonising research agenda is inherently political—never neutral—social justice-oriented and always aims to further the self determination of Indigenous peoples and communities (Baskin 2005; Bishop 1998; Jacobs-Huey 2002; Kovach 2009; Mclsaac 2000; Reyes Cruz 2008; Schnarch 2004; Smith 1999).

So what does it mean to have an Indigenous lens, an Indigenous framework or an Indigenous epistemology? Conceptually, all three of these terms can be used interchangeably to denote a very similar understanding (Kovach 2009; Porsanger 2004). All three of these terms describe a paradigm which, when used in research, guides the entire process. Margaret Kovach, a Cree and Saulteaux scholar (2009: 41), describes epistemology as a philosophy of what counts as knowledge—which is dependent on what one believes to be ‘truth’ and ‘reality’. Similarly, epistemology has been described as the distinct beliefs people hold about knowledge and how that knowing is conceptualised (Aluli-Meyer 2008). Another way to envision (or term) an Indigenous epistemology is to simply understand it as a ‘way of knowing’ (Aluli-Meyer 2008; Brant-Castellano 2000; Lynn 2009; Martin and Mirraboopa 2003; Rheault 2001; Steinhauer 2002). It is a deeply personal way of knowing that is shaped by values, beliefs and experiences. Furthermore, it is (in)formed by your interactions in the world, and the world’s interactions with you.

Kovach (2009: 55-56) elaborates on her description of an Indigenous epistemology when she states that it is ‘simultaneously elusive and ubiquitous, woven tightly with a personal identity that shifts over a life span, ... epistemology captures the “self-in-relation” quality of Indigenous knowledge systems’. This is an apt description for my own process of coming to understand Indigenous epistemology. My knowledge and understanding is continually growing. Through openness to learning, I continue to discover ways of knowing through my blood memories, intuition, family and the teachings and spiritual pathways I pursue as an *Anishinaabekwe* (woman of the Ojibway-Cree nation). I feel the knowledge in my body and in this sense, that knowledge is part of my way of being which is tied to my epistemological understanding as an Anishinaabe woman; it is part of who I am.

The research experience I undertook was guided by my Indigenous Oji-Cree epistemology. I sought to use Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing for my project. The Indigenous expression of research is always connected to the broader understanding of the process as a whole: ways of doing (practices and protocols) are pursued based on the values we honour and live by, our relationships and our personhoods as Indigenous peoples—our ways of being (Aluli-Meyer 2008; Baskin 2005; Kovach 2005, 2009; Lynn 2009; Martin and Mirraboopa 2003; Smith 2000;

Wilson 2001). Spirituality is an excellent example of how an Indigenous research paradigm (i.e. ways of knowing, being and doing) is guided, nourished and strengthened by each of its components, which cannot be explicated from one another. Data analysis in an Indigenous research process does not exclude acknowledging spiritual influences and experiences having occurred before, during or after the research process (Walker 2001). Spirituality (as an individual and/or collective understanding) is a natural facet of the research process, of equal importance to any other research element (Apffel-Marglin 1998; Brant-Castellano 2000; Baskin 2005; Holmes 2000; Walker 2001).

What I wish to focus on regarding Indigenous-centred research is how commonly-held values, practices and ethical protocols that guide research processes are to be carried out 'in a good way'. What is the responsibility of an Indigenous researcher from the 'North', that is, a North American Indigenous person, in carrying out an Indigenous-centred research process with Indigenous peoples from the 'South', that is, South American Indigenous peoples? How does the insider-outsider hyphen apply, and in what ways do these margins, boundaries and hyphens (co)exist? In the same regard, I propose a reimagining of an Indigenous critical ethnography to be understood as a research method which naturally constitutes an Indigenous methodological process. Let me bring in threads of my story to contextualise these questions for their relevance to this inquiry.

From Indigenous Canada to Indigenous Peru: A research proposal

As an undergraduate student in my last year of studies, I applied for an undergraduate research scholarship that, if successful, would grant me \$6000 to undertake 15 weeks of full-time summer research. I wrote the proposal at a time in my academic life when I was nearing the end of my undergraduate schooling, yet only beginning to probe into the field of research. The award was an opportunity for students to gain valuable research skills. I proposed to do an anthropological project, which I described as an 'ethnography of my experiences', that would entail me living with an Indigenous Quechua host family in the rural highland Andean town of Patacancha, Peru. Specifically, I sought to learn from the Indigenous women of the community about their cultural craft making, being their beautiful textile weavings. I was drawn to the idea because I myself come from a family of cultural crafters which has been passed down through my Oji-Cree family through our matrilineal line of women.

My proposal was successful and on 4 July 2009 I boarded the first of three planes that would transport me to a whole new cosmology, that of Peru. I stayed and lived with a magnificent host family for about two months. It was incredible; it was a journey and it was the building of relationships to which I am forever indebted. However, that is not the story I want to tell in this writing. How could I exploit this story of my family and of the community, who are the central figures in these symbiotic connections? This is the tension I sit with today in relation to my research experience. Did I live up to the decolonising research processes I outlined in my ethics and project proposal? Have I been responsible in my research practices as an Indigenous woman? Prior to delving into these complex questions, I want to switch gears momentarily and discuss the methodological use and understandings of ethnography in research processes.

Critical ethnography and ethnography as Indigenous

I branched out from my social work roots and enrolled in an upper level anthropology class about 'power and resistance' in my last undergraduate year of studies at university. In outlining my research proposal, I was reminded of a text by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1995: 419), which frames critical ethnography as a form of militant anthropology. She describes critical ethnography as a site of resistance which can 'exist both as a field of knowledge (discipline) and a field of action'. She writes from the stance that ethnography in this sense is personally and politically engaged and committed. She critiques post-modernist notions of borderless ethnography which disguises post-positivist, re-colonial anthropology under the epistemological guise of the untamable nature of socially-constructed spaces, places, peoples and cultures (Scheper-Hughes 1995: 417).

Soyini Madison (2005: 5) expresses similar sentiments in regards to the nature of critical ethnography when she describes its unsettling nature as occurring from beneath surface-level understandings and appearances. Neutrality and 'taken-for-granted assumptions' are shifted into focus, revealing the 'obscure operations of power and control'. A critical ethnography is not just the collection of observations and data about the cultured other; it is the incorporation of one's self into the research process (Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis 2008). Soyini Madison (2005: 13) describes understanding critical ethnography as the 'performance' of critical theory. Furthermore, Soyini Madison's writing clearly attends to the marriage between positionality and critical ethnography (2005: 7). Positionality can be understood as going beyond one's social location—albeit part of the consideration of positionality—to integrating our fluid reflexive understanding of power, privileges, bias, relationships, contextual implications, epistemic standing and, overall, our multiple, shifting, context-specific and socially-constructed (and influenced) identities (George 2010; Soyini Madison 2005). Critical ethnography, according to Soyini Madison, 'contextualizes our own positionality, thereby making it accessible, transparent and vulnerable to judgment and evaluation—we take ethical responsibility for our own subjectivity and political perspective' (2005: 8).

With these brief and selected descriptions of critical ethnography in mind, let me explore auto-ethnography as a research process and methodology in tandem with Indigenous ethnography. Tomaselli et al. (2008: 357) note the complicated reality of reflexive understanding in auto-ethnography when they write that it 'seems to ask more questions than it answers'. They describe auto-ethnography as a form of reflexive ethnography where interactions are essential components of the research process. It is where the writing of auto-ethnographic encounters is in the first person voice, using narrative accounts and personal anecdotes (Tomaselli et al. 2008). Linking back to Soyini Madison's description of critical ethnography as a performance of critical theory, Tomaselli et al. (2008: 367) compliments this notion when they describe how 'performance ethnography may be a form of a reflexive Indigenous ethnography'. These authors further express that it is 'the Indigenous subjects who are engaging us—the storytellers—in a dialectical way, shaping the outcome, the relationships, and finally the explanation of an encounter' (Tomaselli et al. 2008: 367).

It is at this point that a departure lies in an Indigenous-rooted epistemological understanding of research processes from what is being described by Tomaselli et al. I believe that most Indigenous epistemologies possess understanding (ways of knowing)

that are mutually shared in critical, auto-ethnographic work. This may include the politically-engaged positionality of the research process, the use of narratives and personal reflexivity in presenting 'research', and research as a site of resistance. However, ethnography, whether it be 'critical', 'performative' or 'militant', will be conceptualised and filtered according to the Indigenous epistemological background of the researchers, community and collaborators—who are themselves Indigenous. To write that 'Indigenous subjects engage us', and that we [*the researchers*] are their storytellers, implies a privileged positioning of the 'researcher', which goes against the grain of how Indigenous relational values of research process and methodologies are practiced.

I propose that ethnography or 'Indigenous ethnography' can be (re)framed to be understood as a natural facet of an Indigenous epistemology, from which methods and methodologies flow. Just as the four seasons in Canada repeat themselves each year, in varying degrees of intensity, so do our research processes regenerate, renew and reform. The facets and features of a critical ethnography are natural characteristics of ways of knowing, ways of being and ways of doing inherent in Indigenous worldviews.

Our ways of knowing encompass the same relational, political and storytelling processes described in critical, reflexive and auto-ethnographic research. Indigenous peoples are not our 'subjects' regardless of the insider-outsider hyphen between which Indigenous researchers shift (Humphrey 2007). It is inherent to our ways of knowing, being and doing that encourages us to be our own storytellers, not to assert that our position of power grants us the status of storyteller of the 'Indigenous other'. I am weary of describing the actual details of my homestay experience in Patacancha in the form of written publication for what I see as personal gain in the academy. Language barriers prevented my ability to have shared verbal communication. Therefore, how could I write about my experiences for publication in an ethically responsible way if the process does not engage the other members of the research experience to whom this research is indebted?

Ethical responsibility as an Indigenous researcher

I want to explore this idea of ethical responsibility for Indigenous researchers further, in order to attempt to deconstruct my research processes. When a research project gains ethics review board approval, how is the research process monitored? More often than not, responsibility for carrying out ethical research is left up to the researchers' own evaluation (Koro-Ljungber 2010). Koro-Ljungberg (2010: 605) describes how a 'good', responsible qualitative researcher is one who strives to (de)centre the margins of research by remaining open to change, acknowledging power dynamics and forms of oppressive inequities, and being mindful that research does not end when papers have been published and presented because 'new knowledge are being constructed beyond our intentions and efforts as researchers'. An Indigenous perspective compliments these sentiments by digging deeper into how responsible relations are tied to the communities and people with whom Indigenous researchers engage.

Indigenous research is often community-centred, community-driven and community-focused in its processes and aims (Hodge and Lester 2005; Schnarch 2002). The self-determining agenda of decolonising research speaks to research done by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples (Smith 1999). Kovach (2009: 142) discusses how Indigenous protocols should stress the responsibility of the researcher to hold as sacred the cultural knowledges with which they engage. Kovach's writing is able to

delineate, mesh and concisely describe how the relational aspect inherent to an Indigenous-centred research process is a form of ethics as a methodology:

... trusting relationships are engendered in a variety of ways: following protocol, showing guardianship over sacred knowledges, standing by cultural validity of knowledge, and giving back. In Cree, the word *miyo* means 'good, well, beautiful, valuable'. The word 'ethics' is not differentiated. Values and ethics are interconnected and are about *miyo*, about goodness. In thinking about Indigenous research ethics, the overarching theme is to conduct oneself in a way that reflects *miyo* (Kovach 2009: 147).

Ethical protocols that are in place to guide the goodness of Indigenous research include adhering to the values of the four Rs: responsibility, respect, reciprocity and relevance in research (Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991). Similarly, many Aboriginal communities and organisations in Canada follow the principles of OCAP which are: ownership, control, access and possession of research and its processes (Schnarch 2002).

In my proposed research, I drew greatly on the work of Smith (1999) in framing my research as a relational project that was rooted in the value of respect and reciprocity. I was clear about my desire to engage in relationships with women, and particularly the women in my host family. In writing my proposal, I felt the need to 'legitimise' my project by describing how I would utilise traditional Western anthropological methods such as participant observation, yet what I really wanted to do was simply to learn from my family and community members, in a respectful way that might actually generate some mutual benefit through sharing our cultural craft making. Like Smith (1999), I didn't even feel comfortable describing my project as 'research'. My reluctance for labelling it as such was due to the historical legacy of research done to and about Indigenous peoples. I did not want to travel to Peru to study, to document and appropriate their weaving designs or to theorise on my interactions with them. I simply wanted to engage in relationships in the most respectful way that I knew how. Before leaving my host family, I gifted them with handmade crafts from my First Nations culture including a quilt made by an uncle, as a sign of respect and to show my utmost gratitude for their graciousness in allowing me into their homes, and into their lives. I remain committed to visiting and keeping in touch with my host family for the rest of my life.

What is unsettling about this experience is how the research project was initiated by *me*, not the community. Although I was framing my research in an Indigenous-centered way, and even though I myself am an Indigenous woman, I question whether it was ethically responsible for me to drop in on the community on my own whim. Upon arrival into the community, it was difficult to explain to my host family why I was using only Spanish language (via an interpreter, as I am not a fluent speaker) to a family whose mother tongue is Quechua. My home stay was set up through a non-profit organisation [*Awamaki*] and I sensed that my host family and the community perceived me as another volunteer 'tourista', not a student doing 'research'. Nevertheless, given my hesitation about the term 'research', I still hoped that my family knew why I had come. Even though the experience overall with my family was amazing, I wonder how intrusive was my stay? My home stay provided my family with extra income as I paid both the *Awamaki* organisation and my family directly. I continue to contemplate whether I would have done this 'research' in the same way today?

I want to attempt to peel back some of the layers of my experience by exploring the concept of insider-outsider and the positionality of 'native' ethnographers in research.

To be an insider-outsider in an Indigenous context means possessing multiple, shifting and fluid ways of being both an insider and outsider (Humphrey 2007; Jacobs-Huey 2002; Kovach 2009; Smith 1999). In an Indigenous context, the role of an insider-outsider—whether in research, social work practice or education—usually refers to an Indigenous person belonging to the same community as they are engaging with (Kanuha 2000; Kovach 2009, Smith 1999; Rigney 1999). When I reflect upon my research experience, my positionality entails being an Indigenous woman, a First Nations woman from the Oji-Cree Nation of Turtle Island (aka North America). I was aware of how my positionality as an Indigenous woman of the ‘first world’ who is Western-educated and English-speaking, going into an Indigenous community of the ‘third world’ might be perceived as a research relationship that fosters a power imbalance, since it was essentially an independent research project with no mutual conception (Smith 1999).

Yet there was, and still is, an essential part of my being that feels a connection to the Indigenous peoples of Peru, to my family, and to the land and sky that nourishes and surrounds Patacancha, the community where I stayed. I was keenly aware that I was an outsider, another ‘tourista’ in the community, yet it was about the relations I made, the ways I could connect in respectful and meaningful ways with the people there, that made me feel as though I occupied some sort of global Indigenous space. A space in which I could walk across the borders, and dance in between the hyphen. In fact, during my first night sleeping in the village, I travelled back home to visit my family in the realm of dream state. Crossing borders to visit my family back home on the northern side of the hemisphere, while physically occupying the space of the southern hemisphere. In reflecting on this experience, does my spiritual and relational connection to the people and lands of Patacancha and the people and lands of my Oji-Cree territory neutralise these concerns of a possible power imbalance?

My inability to provide answers to some of the questions I have proposed in this writing have resulted in the realisation that interrogating research notions of hyphens, insider-outsider, of ethics and responsibilities, is not a straightforward matter. While in some regards I believe my fluid understanding of my Indigenous positionality and relational processes supported my project being carried out in a ‘good way’, I do not mean to romanticise the process. As fluid as my positionality may seem, there underlies an unstable anxiety concerning my Indigenous ethical accountability. Writers like Marker (2003) and Hodge and Lester (2005) question Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers about ‘whose interests are being served’ when research is pursued among and within Indigenous peoples. A researcher-centric project is one that has been conceptualised with defined boundaries and structures outside and apart from the ‘participants’ with whom the researcher wishes to engage (Hodge and Lester 2005). Hodge and Lester (2005) assert in their writing that a researcher must be prepared to be invited into the Indigenous community in order for research to be undertaken.

Charles Menzies (2001), an Indigenous anthropologist of Tsimshian and Tlingit descent, reminds us that just because a researcher is Indigenous does not equate with the research being an inherently pure form of ethical processes and findings. Although a sense of ‘insiderness’ can have its benefits, it should not be generalised or romanticised to let Indigenous researchers off the hook from critical reflexivity and accountability. Jacobs-Huey (2002: 797) discusses the politics of representation for ‘Native researchers’ whereby choosing what ‘voice(s)’ to include in published reports or writings relegates knowledge exchanges into a form of cultural brokering. She also

raises interesting points about the dialogic, complex and multiple subjective spaces of positionalit(ies) between Native researchers and research participants (Jacobs-Huey 2002). Other authors discuss the need to problematise positionalities in order to engage in critical reflexivity in research processes as both the 'self and other are joined by the hyphen that simultaneously divides and unites multiple identities and realities' (Jankie 2004: 92). Meanwhile, writers in the area of critically-engaged and reflexive ethnography such as Soyini Madison (2005: 8) discuss positionalities from a critical ethnography standpoint which reminds us to contextualise our positions, to be transparent, to be vulnerable to judgment, and to 'take ethical responsibility for our own subjectivity and political perspective, resisting the trap of gratuitous self-centeredness'.

With all these thought-provoking quotes and crisp descriptions of positionality, ethics, responsibility and representation, the further unsettled my own stance becomes. These writings emerge from multiple fields and therefore occupy multiple sites of theoretical inquiry. I find a hybridised approach to inquiry important, yet at the same time I have trouble defining my research processes and writing as anything more than an Indigenous-centred perspective that is grounded in how I see, live and experience the world. It is my Oji-Cree epistemology as an Oji-Cree woman. There is no uncomplicated conclusion to my research processes and therefore, to this academic prose. The knowledge and reflections that are born from my research experience are unbound and intertwined.

I wish to expose part of my research story through a more familiar way. The use of storytelling has been said to blur the discursive lines of research traditions (Marker 2003). Storytelling as an Indigenous methodology does not require citations to secure its legitimacy as a reputable source of knowledge. Storytelling is a resistance to the Western hegemony of cognitive imperialism that imposes what is and is not considered acceptable in research writing and practices (Battiste 2002). Personal experiential knowledge is viewed as a sacred expression in Indigenous research which is to be respected as a valid form of data expression. More importantly, it is a methodology that honours the traditions of our Ancestors (Kovach 2009; Thomas 2005). As an Indigenous researcher, I feel it is my responsibility to share part of my research story with you, in keeping with the Indigenous ethical protocols of reciprocity and respect. To honour the host family I lived with in Patacancha who have touched my heart and allowed me the opportunity to form lasting relationships. This sharing of a story does not propose to tell the story of an 'other', rather it aims to respect the relationships I have engaged in while in Peru, by sharing part of my sacred truth. In the spirit of reciprocity, I want to put forth to the academic community a writing that reflects my knowledge as an Indigenous crafts woman. In undertaking research within the academy, I am expected to publish on the outcomes of the research endeavour. Reflecting upon my research experience in Peru has become my outcome. I have realised that sharing a story of my own origin is a powerful source of knowledge exchange and that this is part of my story.

Through mothers hands to daughters eyes

My mother is a crafter, she is a moccasin maker and a beader. She learned how to sew moccasins and bead delicate floral designs using tiny glass seed beads when she was fourteen years old. Her mother, my *gokum*, Beatrice Bedwash, taught her. My mother began making moccasins and other cultural crafts regularly in her early thirties. When I was about twelve years old, my mother taught me how to bead and sew. I completed

my first pair of moccasins when I was about nineteen years old. I have been sewing, beading and making moccasins for many years now, although I am still learning. My mother teaches me continuously as I seek her advice and ask for her help. When my mother teaches me, just as her mother taught her, she tells me to look. I often ask, 'Mom, why are you doing that?' or 'Mom, what am I suppose to do here?', and her answer is usually the same: 'Are you watching? — Look!'. I often find it hard to learn this way. I yearn for some Western clarification ... some sort of written guidebook to explain to me step-by-step how patterns are to be made, and which way stitches are to be sewn.

When I am frustrated with my mistakes, my mother tells me: 'This is how you learn ... when I made a mistake, I would take the whole thing apart and start over again ... that is how you learn—until you get it right'. It is not easy to learn this way, but it is learning by doing, by repetition, by trial and error. It is a knowledge that is created by feel, by intuition and by practice. My mother has been dealing with arthritic hands and joints for the past eleven years. It makes her work harder, longer and more painfully, but it keeps her hands in motion. She tells me: 'Before I had arthritis, if I really wanted to, I could put together a pair of moccasins in about eight hours. Now, it would take at least two days'. However, moccasins are not generally made in an individual sequential order; she usually sews them in stages, multiple pairs at a time.

My mom tells me she is grateful to have learned how to make crafts from her mother. She told me the other day how proud she is of her mother and I completely agree. My *gokum* was a medicine woman, a midwife, a hunter and trapper, a mother of twelve children, a bush woman and a crafter. She passed away when I was only sixteen years old, yet she had lived to about ninety years of age. My mother told me my *gokum* would be proud of me, for knowing how to make moccasins. I remember my mother telling me once that she had the best mom in the world ... as I think the same of her. My mother's hands are talented. They hold the knowledge of her mother, my *gokum*, and of my *chi-gokum* (great grandmother) and of all the generations of our Ancestors. They live on through her hands. When I was rubbing my mother's hands one day, I said 'gee your hands are soft'. She laughed, and proceeded to tell me how she believed soft hands were usually a sign of an 'old person'. I asked her if my *gokum* had soft hands and she said 'of course'. Now when I touch the softness of her hands, I am even more aware of the generations she holds within them, and then I will say to her 'gee mom ... your hands are so *rough*', and together, we laugh.

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