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Native Spirituality: Spirit Piracy and Native Sweat Lodges

by

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A THESIS

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## ABSTRACT

This research is an investigation into a social phenomenon that I refer to as Spirit Piracy. Set in the context of the Native sweat lodge ceremony, the main points that address this phenomenon focus on: 1) an age-old process of spiritual fragmentation; 2) protocols and natural laws of communication between humans and the spirit world; and 3) developing an awareness of spiritual interconnectedness that exists throughout the universe. The Indigenous Cree three-tiered<sup>1</sup> universe is used to demonstrate the natural order of the universe—something humans have reinterpreted over time. Results from a literature review and a synthesis of eight interviews conclude that the “spirit of colonialism” has entered the lodge. The concept of Spirit Piracy has a broad application and in this research is used to emphasize the need to protect the Native sweat lodge ceremony as a natural and spiritual resource that defines cultural identities and heritages.

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to the Indigenous Cree spiritual belief system as three-tiered, but according to Mandelbaum (1979:302) the Cree also believed in a four-tiered system that included the underworld.

## PREFACE

If we live in an era of awareness, why then do we continue a cycle of spiritual fragmentation that moves the human spirit away from that of the universe? This research is about Native Spirituality and activities of *Spirit Piracy* taking place in the traditional Native sweat lodge ceremony. I coin and define the term *Spirit Piracy* as the ‘human violation of natural laws.’ This term is explained in Section 1.3 “What this thesis is about” and in Chapter 5, *The Principle of Spirit Piracy*.

Central to this research is the traditional Native sweat lodge ceremony. It serves as an anchor point on Mother Earth – an entry point to the spirit world – a place that teaches human beings about our spiritual interconnectedness with the natural world. This research is not ‘about’ divulging intimate secrets of the sweat lodge or about instructing on ‘how to’ build and lead the proper sweat lodge, but is demonstrative of how *Spirit Piracy* works. The Native sweat lodge is a place where I return to and will continue to return to in the future for spiritual instruction and nurturing from Mother Earth that is connected to the spirituality of the universe.

Spiritual fragmentation is traceable back in religion, science, and colonial history. The framework of spiritual fragmentation is set up where colonialism acts as an umbrella for colonization/colonialism, science, and religion. I do not for a moment suggest that spiritual fragmentation has not occurred among Indigenous groups prior to colonization. Tribal wars, kidnappings, and human sacrifices and spiritual curses were part of the human experience among Indigenous peoples. My reason for drawing a comparison between colonial and Indigenous worldviews is to emphasize a progression over time that leads to the spiritual deprivation in society at present. According to a Western/colonial

worldview, the spirit and physical worlds are considered separate, while the Indigenous worldview recognizes that the physical and spirit worlds are different, but that the two exist as a seamless whole. Many readers may decide that I have fallen into a binary situation between the colonial and Indigenous worldviews, thus committing spiritual fragmentation myself. To a certain extent I agree with this, as one of my committee members pointed out during my oral examination that, “The impact of colonialism on Spirit Piracy” would have been more appropriate. However, I wish to point out that many spiritual seekers turn to Native spiritual ceremonies to repair the rupture of spiritual fragmentation, but because society is hostage to colonial assumptions and paradigms, many fail to respect and understand the spiritual practices that are meant to heal them.

In understanding the activities of *Spirit Piracy* in the context of the Native sweat lodge ceremony, it is then possible to apply this concept to a much broader spectrum – issues of environmental destruction, piracy of plant and animal biodiversity, cultural genocides through political wars, and all types of addictions, just to mention a few. From an Indigenous perspective, everything is considered to have Spirit, as all was created from a divine source of spiritual energy and power. As human keepers of the land, plants and animals, and the rest of the natural world, it is our duty to care for these sacred gifts. This includes one another and oneself, for now and for the future. As stated in Wilson (2008: 87), “The only difference between human beings and four leggeds and plants is the shadow they cast.” But even with these shadows, we are all under the same sun that puts us into relationship with one another.

International policies recognize the importance of Indigenous ceremonies as human, cultural, and inherent rights as noted in the United Nations Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004) where,

The declaration provides that Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, economic, social, and cultural characteristics (art. 4), and a right not to be subjected to ethnocide, cultural genocide, or assimilation (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000: 257).

Principle 12b of the Earth Charter Initiative states,

Affirm the right of indigenous peoples to their spirituality, knowledge, lands and resources and to their related practice of sustainable livelihoods (Earth Charter 2000).

These are two sources of many that advocate the need for the protection of cultural and spiritual diversity at the community, national, and international level.

The aim of this research is twofold. First, to demonstrate how the breach of Indigenous cultural and spiritual heritage hurts everybody, Native and non-Native peoples alike; and secondly, to bring awareness to the beauty of the spirit world when the emotionality of the universe reveals itself to humanity.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to first acknowledge Pauline Fisk, Graduate Program Administrator for the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program at the University of Calgary. Pauline's patience in explaining the application process for the Master's Program, numerous forms, and reminders of deadlines along with encouragement and support gave me the confidence to achieve a lifelong dream. I especially remember January 21, 2008 when I was chatting with Pauline about trying to locate a story on how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people. After showing her Bruchac's book *The Native American Sweat Lodge: History and Legends*, Pauline searched for Bruchac's contact information on the Internet for which I followed up on and learned about the scholarly work of Frank Speck (1925).

To the present director of the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program (IGP), Dr. Tom Keenan: It is very special when a person of such talent can recognize gifts in others and encourages them to achieve their potentials. Yes, I agree those who fought their way into IGP are there because "we are 'oddballs' that don't fit anywhere else with our unique ideas that will change the world."

There are three committee members on my panel for the Master's Degree Program at the University of Calgary. These include my academic supervisor Dr. James S. Frideres, Department of Sociology, Dr. Anne White, Department of Religious Studies, and Dr. Wisdom Tettey, Faculty of Communication and Culture. I also wish to add a note to Dr. Michael Kim Zapf, Faculty of Social Work who sat as the external examiner, to Dr. William Ross, Faculty of Environmental Design who sat as the neutral chair, and to Dr. Betty Bastien, Faculty of Social Work.

To Dr. Anne White: I express my deepest gratitude for your kindness, direction, and your precious time in reviewing and revising drafts of a conference paper and of this thesis. The assistance you gave me when I prepared for the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Northwest Anthropology Conference held in Victoria, British Columbia, April 23-26, 2008 resulted in the publication of my first academic paper (Laplante 2008). Thank you!

While completing my final courses for a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Development Studies in Ghana, West Africa in 2006, I told Dr. Tettey that it took me eight years to complete two B.A. Degrees (Development Studies and International Indigenous Studies), so I thought I would stretch out the time to ten years and complete a Master's Degree. Thank you Dr. Tettey for your intellect, your kind heart, and telling me that "the fire" I have is critical to academic success.

To Dr. James Frideres: On many occasions I have thanked you for walking along side of me and guiding me through this journey. You have encouraged me to continue my studies in doctoral work. How blessed and fortunate I have been with such a wonderful supervisor! Your gifted abilities with guiding students through the academic process are just simply beyond words.

To Dr. Michael Kim Zapf: Several things stand out for me in your participation of my oral examination as the external examiner. The funniest is in exchanging stories on how various Native elders come into our lives at certain times. Also, I appreciated how you decided to note in the Examiner's Report on Thesis that "there were some issues of definition" and these would be addressed in the oral exam, rather than inking them on paper. This approach is Indigenous.

I wish to thank Dr. William Ross, Faculty of Environment Design who sat as the neutral chair. Thank you for keeping the meeting on schedule and for delivering the news that I had passed both the thesis writing and the oral examination for my Master's Degree.

My sincerest thank you goes to Dr. Betty Bastien, Faculty of Social Work who guided me through the first part of this journey as my first supervisor. Thank you for emphasizing the importance of spiritual renewal and for helping me see the breath of Spirit Piracy and its broad application.

Concluding the list of acknowledgement is my deepest gratitude for the funding I generously received. These agencies include: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC); Graduate Student Scholarship, Alberta Scholarship Program; Queen Elizabeth II Scholarship; and the Ron Ghitter Award in Human Rights.

## EPIGRAPH

When you have come to know some of nature's wise ways  
beware of your complacency for you cannot be wiser than  
nature.

Chief Dan George (George and Hirschall 2004:20)

Religion and spirituality are not synonymous. Religion is only one of the ways through which spirituality finds expression. It is a faith-based institution, through which belief systems and practices become recognizable in particular practice traditions. Spirituality, on the other hand, is the inner self that defines who we are. It is developed and expressed in many ways outside of religion ... spirituality involves the relationship between the individual, the collective and the universe.

Love & Simpson (2004:319)

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

This thesis focuses on Native<sup>2</sup> Spirituality and traditional sweat lodge ceremonies.

The introductory chapter is divided into three parts. Part I provides structural information for placing the Native sweat lodge in an academic context. Part II outlines the substantive content that emerged from this research. Part III introduces the meaning of protocols and natural laws in the context of the Native sweat lodge ceremony.

### **Part I**

#### **1.1 Rationale**

This thesis is about the shift of our social consciousness which places Spirit first in our daily lives to live in accordance with the natural order as instructed to us by the Creator/Great Spirit. At the same time, I wish to make clear that this research is not about barring non-Natives from the sweat lodge. It is not about ‘how to’ properly conduct the sweat lodge ceremony. Nor is it about illuminating intimate details of a sacred ceremony. The focus of this thesis is to explore a problematic social phenomenon that I refer to as “Spirit Piracy” that is taking place around traditional Native sweat lodge ceremonies.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use the words “Native,” “Aboriginal,” “First Nations” and “Indigenous” interchangeably, but tend to use “Indigenous” in a global sense, whereas I use “Native,” “First Nations” and “Aboriginal” as local Canadian terms referring to the original peoples of the land before European arrival. “Native American” is used in the American context. And the word “Indian” (a legal term in Canadian Law) is used as referenced in scholarly works or by Native elders.

## **1.2 Positionality of researcher and the Native sweat lodge ceremony**

There are two positionalities in this research: my own and that of the sweat lodge. What I bring to this research is a personal investment and responsibility to protect what is sacred and what is part of my ancestral heritage. I am French-Cree Métis and have actively participated in traditional Native sweat lodge ceremonies for the past thirteen years and assist elders in conducting parts of the ceremony. I feel the need to protect what I love, as the sweat lodge is a place that I return to for spiritual teachings and guidance.

From an academic perspective, I am a researcher and scholar. Combining these two roles, I am tasked with the ontological responsibility to contribute to the academic pool of knowledge and leave behind a healthy ceremony for future generations to follow. The sweat lodge takes on positionality when enlivened by the spirits invoked to assist in a healing and purification process with human beings. The lodge becomes a conduit for communication between the physical and spirit realms. This positionality is discussed at greater lengths in Chapter 4 on *The Native Sweat Lodge Ceremony*.

## **Part II**

### **1.3 What this thesis is about**

Set in the context of traditional Native sweat lodge ceremonies in Western Canada, this thesis investigates a problematic social phenomenon that I refer to as Spirit Piracy. There are eight interview participants in total: one non-Native herbalist and seven Native elders from different nations (who lead lodges) are interviewed to learn about protocols and natural laws around the lodge. The centrality and importance of the Cree three-tiered universe anchors this research in an Indigenous spiritual framework from which to



understand how and why Spirit Piracy takes place. It is from within the lodge and through ceremonies that we learn about natural laws and our interconnectedness with the natural world. It also is from within the lodge that we observe how social structures based in humano-centrism and colonialism has created a rupture in spirituality and continues to do so. These cause the human spirit to move away from the spirituality of the

I coin and define the term Spirit Piracy as the human violation of natural laws—it is the pirating of spirit from people, places, and things. I indicate that it is ‘humans’ that violate natural laws for animals live in accordance with them. Birds build their nests in the springtime, bees communicate with each other on which blossoms to pollinate, and bears instinctively prepare for winter hibernation in the fall.

Although this research is of a spiritual nature, the distinction between the two words ‘spirit’ and ‘spiritual’ further leads to a linkage from Spirit Piracy to spiritual fragmentation and internalized colonization. The distinction between the two terms is very important because it is the crux of the entire thesis. When I say ‘Spirit Piracy,’ I refer to the spirit within the individual that is affected. The use of the word ‘piracy’ refers to the misuse and abuse of the spirit (sacred energy) through actions of misappropriation, negation, and wounding. It refers to the inappropriate action by humans that displaces the sacred energy within individual forms. There is a wide spectrum in which Spirit Piracy takes place. For instance, if a person sexually abuses another person, a wounding of sacred energy occurs. A perpetrator wounds the victim by stealing and wounding that person’s embodied spirit. It is in this sense that I use the word ‘piracy’ in combination with ‘spirit.’

An equally important example of Spirit Piracy would be if a person secretly taped sacred songs during a sweat lodge ceremony without the elder's knowledge for the ultimate purpose of sale. This would pirate the spirit of the song, the ceremony, and that of the participants'. This form of Spirit Piracy would be a misappropriation of the ceremony itself, as commercialization of the sacred violates traditional teachings.

I use the term 'natural laws' in reference to human relationships with the natural world, and not in the sense of judicial law. For instance, when a person works with a sacred sweat lodge fire, there must be respect for the spirit of the fire otherwise there could be a consequence of getting burned. This is an example of working in accordance to the natural laws of fire. Another example of natural law is in our relationship to trees. A tree is more than its roots, trunk, branches, and leaves. It is an extension of ourselves as we breathe the oxygen it cleans, make fires from its dry wood, and use its leaves to make tea. Thus, to wound a live tree by stripping all of its bark is to negate and pirate the spirit of the tree. This in turn affects our relationship with the tree, as the tree would likely die from its injuries.

When the Creator/Great Spirit created the universe, the same life force energy was used to create all life forms in the universe. Thus, the same life force or "blood energy" runs throughout all creation. It runs through planets and stars, the sun and moon, rivers, mountains, wind, rocks, trees, humans, orca whales, swallowtail butterflies, crickets, and frogs—all of creation—hence, the term "all my relations." Henderson (2006:135-144) speaks about all members of creation as having "embodied spirits":

All elements of nature—land, water, plants, animals, and humans—have interdependent embodied spirits that can be apprehended in diverse forms. Each spirit is considered as

important and significant. Each is a gifted teacher. Neither the spirits nor the forms are capable of existing apart. These spirits and embodied forms are not seen as natural resources to be exploited; they are seen as sacred life-sustaining forces. All the spirits and the forms are vulnerable to change, and they are never isolated. Changes in any one life form affect all the other life forms. (Henderson 2006:135).

Peat (1994:65) speaks about coming into relationship with the spirit of plants, animals, and the spirit world; “coming-to-knowing means entering into relationship with the spirit of knowledge, with plants and animals, with beings that animate dreams and visions, and with the spirit of the people.” Peat and Henderson point out that everything has a spirit. The Spirit Piracy that I refer to is about pirating the spirit that lives in all elements of life.

Although the spirit is different from a sage plant to a willow and between grandmother and grandfather rocks, each is unique, has a purpose, and an inherent right to life. To cause harm to the embodied spirit within rocks, rattles and drums, water and willows or for that matter, to the self or each other, is to cause harm to the blood energy that runs through all sacred beings—it is to pirate its spirit. This is what I mean by the term, Spirit Piracy.

A fundamental natural law as set by the Creator Spirit is that humans are to care for all life forms. Thus, to cause harm to the spirit that lives in various bodies is to wound the Creator. Spiritual fragmentation is another term I use that refers to the inversion of sacred covenants. Humanity once knew of its responsibilities as originally instructed by the Creator/Great Spirit to be custodians of the land, animals, and each other. However, over time humans changed the interpretation of the original instructions

to satisfy their own wills and desires first. In effect, humans have placed themselves equal to or above the Creator spirit. This process is spiritual fragmentation.

These changes are traceable in the history of religion, science, and colonization. What we saw in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and currently in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is an increase in spiritual seekers, both Native and non-Native alike. The New Age movement of the 1980's is representative of how the spirit of Indigenous spiritual customs has been pirated in favour of commercializing the sacred. Aldred (2000:329) tells us that, "New Agers pursue spiritual meaning and cultural identification through acts of purchase." New Agers have misappropriated and commercialized the sweat lodge ceremony, taken to giving themselves Native "spirit names," and profess to be medicine people and white shamans. This is an act of Spirit Piracy as Indigenous knowledge and spiritual beliefs are taken and sold for profit by people who have no right to take what is not theirs. The way to explain this behaviour is simply as an outward manifestation of internalized colonization. It is an indication that society continues to work from within spiritually fragmented structures.

The process of spiritual fragmentation through colonization has imbued the human psyche to where non-Natives justify the take-over of Indigenous spiritual belief systems. No thought is given to the long histories of Aboriginal removal, displacement, and cultural genocide by the colonizers. The practice of selling the sacred is spiritual fragmentation and an act of neo-colonialism. What has taken place is that a colonial image has been superimposed over Indigenous belief systems. This is an example of Spirit Piracy. To understand the principle of Spirit Piracy, I use the Indigenous Cree

three-tiered universe, which illustrates the three levels of spiritual order and a natural order from which to observe and explain spiritual discontinuity.

There are two conceptual frameworks underpinning this research: the Indigenous Cree three-tiered belief system and colonialism that is superimposed. This research is based on a theory that the “spirit” of colonialism has entered the lodge—it has come in the form of Spirit Piracy masking internalized colonization. Spirit Piracy is a step beyond spiritual fragmentation, as a deeper form of internalized colonization, one that seeks to pirate the spirit of people, places, and things. Metaphorically speaking, Spirit Piracy acts as an agent that wounds and chips away at the DNA sequencing of the sacred life force energy that lives in all creation. It is in understanding the Cree three-tiered universe that we observe how colonialism has inverted the sacred order of the cosmos.

#### **1.4 Research problem**

The research problem focuses on exploring a social and spiritual phenomenon taking place in and around the Native sweat lodge ceremony. Although many participants seek spiritual renewal in these ceremonies, some of their behaviours indicate interests in acquiring spirituality through objects rather than in the process of prayer and developing spiritual sight by relating to the spirit of the rocks, water, the lodge, the ancestors and the spirit world, and the Creator Spirit.

Explanation of the social phenomenon of Spirit Piracy may lie partly in social changes that took place with regard to the ban on Aboriginal ceremonies during 1885-1951 to the influence of the New Age movement in the 1970's. Nearly thirty years after the first assault by the Canadian government came another assault on Native spirituality

that spiked in the late 1980's and the 1990's when Aboriginal/Native peoples reacted to the New Age movement and the misappropriation of Native culture and spiritual traditions, particularly the medicine wheel and the sweat lodge. As pop-culture and the 1980's New Age movement set its sights on Native American spiritual practices as a means to fill a sense of spiritual deprivation in their own lives, traditional practices such as the Native sweat lodge ceremony and Native spirituality became a target for commodification and commercialization.

Based upon my participation and observations of other participants' behaviours around the lodge ceremony over the past decade, I argue that protocols of natural laws are not well understood, consequently furthering an age-old process of spiritual fragmentation.

This thesis will investigate how sweat lodge participants understand the protocol, the meaning of natural laws, and how the two come together in communicating with the spirit world in the purification process of the ceremony. I also will look at the knowledge base and understanding of those who operate sweat lodges in Western Canada. Three guiding questions posed to Native elders are: 1) What are the protocols around the Native sweat lodge ceremony? 2) How does the traditional sweat lodge teach us about natural laws? and 3) How has the sweat lodge ceremony transitioned over the past decade or more?

### **1.5 Outline of chapters**

In chapter 2, the theoretical framework and literature review are combined. The theoretical framework juxtaposes the colonial and Native worldviews where at the heart

of these two worldviews lays opposing spiritual belief systems. I have placed the Indigenous Cree three-tiered universe as the foundational spiritual framework to describe the natural order of the universe. The Indigenous worldview believes that spirit exists in all things, so it is natural to pray to the spirit of a rock or a tree. Superimposed on this framework is a colonial worldview that considers the spirit world as separate from the physical world and where humans are superior to the natural world. I have structured this framework in this particular way to reflect a transition over time where the colonization of North America has brought with it a colonization of thought, social structures, and religious beliefs that has also attempted to supplant Indigenous spiritual belief systems. Ballard (1993:10) describes this layering as a “vener of Western thought,” which is set over an Indigenous way of knowing. It is from this framework that I build a case to demonstrate how the “spirit” of colonialism has entered the lodge. The ultimate goal however of this research is to find our way forward into healing from the process of spiritual fragmentation.

Since literature on colonialism is endless, the present review focuses on literature that supports the idea that Aboriginal society lives within colonial structures. To no surprise is that Native scholars and elders remain leery of the process of decolonization and post-colonialism believing that Indigenous knowledge and spiritual ceremonies are at risk of further exploitation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Smith 1999:14; Simpson 2004:126; Mgbeoji 2005:12).

Although Native and non-Native scholars work to bridge colonial and Indigenous worldviews, the message has not reached groups such as New Agers who believe (for a variety of reasons) that “Indians” are a conquered people and appropriating Indigenous

spiritual practices such as the sweat lodge ceremony is acceptable. The appropriation and misappropriation of Indigenous spiritual practices has been normalized through colonization to the point where little consideration, if any, is given to the histories of First Nation peoples who have fought to retain ancestral lands, languages, and spiritual ceremonies. Some Native elders believe it best to open the sweat lodge ceremony to the outside world (Auger 1999:iv)<sup>3</sup> while others believe the subject of traditional sweat lodges is ceremonial and does not belong in academia. The literature is divided, but what remains consistent is the need for Native peoples to determine and define what, when, and how much to share with “outsiders” to maintain cultural continuity within individual groups and tribes (Owl 1992:193).

Chapter 3 covers the methodology used to gather data for this research. A qualitative research design was used to survey seven Native elders from different nations who lead traditional sweat lodge ceremonies and one non-Native participant that takes part in lodges. Storytelling and storylistening skills were used as an Indigenous research method of gathering data and transferring Indigenous knowledge. Both the storyteller and the listener share in the reciprocal responsibility of teaching and learning—this is considered a natural law of reciprocity.

Chapter 4 focuses on the history and description of the traditional Native sweat lodge ceremony. I include a brief literature review on historical accounts of the sweat

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<sup>3</sup> Dale Auger incorporated a sweat lodge ceremony in the video production of “Mamawi” as part of his doctoral dissertation. Dale Auger, “First Nations Education: Sharing of Knowledge” (doctoral dissertation, University of Calgary, 1999), 1-34.



lodge, as well as contemporary views held by Native lodge holders on sharing this sacred tradition.

Chapter 5 provides a definition to the principle of Spirit Piracy. Four of my personal stories are used to explain and demonstrate how Spirit Piracy works, how protocols are violated, and consequences that result from such actions. The fourth story is special because it illustrates how adhering to protocols can result in bearing witness to the sacred in the form of “blue rocks” in the sweat lodge.

In chapter 6, I analyze the data gathered from interviews with Native elders and a non-Native participant of sweat lodge ceremonies. Each speaks about the sacredness of the lodge, protocols, natural laws, and consequences to Spirit Piracy. Data often appears in the form of storytelling—a practice common among Aboriginal cultures as a way to transfer knowledge particularly from a spiritual perspective. Medicine people and lodge leaders speak about spiritual tensions experienced on two levels—on the physical level between participants and at the level of the spirit world.

Chapter 7 is a synthesis of interview responses that answers the research questions posed. The seven Native participants agreed that a problematic social phenomenon is taking place around the traditional Native sweat lodge ceremony. On the other hand, the non-Native participant disagreed that Spirit Piracy is happening; rather that any attempt at moving a person forward spiritually is good regardless of how it is done. However, all participants believe that there are consequences to violating protocols and natural laws, particularly around ceremonial practices.

Chapter 8 is the conclusion of the research findings. Consensus among elders finds that a clash between traditional ways and modernity has created a rift in cultural

continuity, which furthers the process of spiritual fragmentation. There is a concern among Native elders that protocols may not be strong enough to hold back the force of neo-colonialism. As the number of spiritual seekers increases, so does the need for sweat lodges. Native elders caution against “playing around” with the sweat lodge as there are consequences to such behaviours. When the harmful effects of Spirit Piracy are realized, a person can actually experience deep emotional pain and fear. This is a result of a shift in consciousness where a person recognizes his or her intimate interconnectedness to the greater spirituality of the universe—what is done to any form of an embodied spirit reverberates throughout the entire universe affecting everyone including you and I. Examples are also included at the end of the chapter on the broad application of Spirit Piracy.

### **1.6 Broad application of Spirit Piracy**

As everything has a spirit, it is at risk of being pirated. This is particularly relevant to environmental issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> century of global warming, climate change, and the mass extinction of species and biodiversity. Spirit Piracy lends itself to a multitude of academic disciplines and industry such as: development studies, political science, religious studies, planning and development, biochemistry, mental health and addictions, animal protection, archaeology and anthropology, Indigenous studies, and museology, for example, in the repatriation of human remains and ceremonial artifacts (McMahon 2004).

In summary, this research concerns a problematic social phenomenon I refer to as Spirit Piracy. The Native sweat lodge ceremony is used as a spiritual paradigm to observe this phenomenon. This research is about protecting a Native spiritual and

cultural heritage from neo-colonialism, as it is the premise of this thesis that the “spirit of colonialism” has entered the lodge. Participants’ behaviours indicate that protocols and natural laws are not well understood. Those who commit acts of Spirit Piracy (whether knowingly or unknowingly) are caught in colonial assumptions and paradigms. They have inverted the natural order of the cosmos as set by the Creator/Great Spirit. In doing this, the human spirit is separated and moved away from the spirituality of the universe.

### **Part III**

#### **1.7 Protocols and natural laws**

##### *a) Protocols*

Protocols around the Native sweat lodge are specific to each lodge and even within the same tribe protocols differ.

Participants consistently state that there is a proper way to run a sweat, and individuals today seek the ‘correct way’ of proceeding. This debate over propriety is ... an important factor in validating one’s practice of the ritual and represents the working out on the ground of the dialectic between history and contemporary need, between continuity and change. (Bucko 1999:81).

Protocols are a set of procedures based upon respect, humility, and kindness. This includes dress codes, not walking between the doorway of the lodge and the sacred fire once it is lit, and in most traditional lodges there is a prohibition against menstruating women entering the sweat lodge. Again, protocols vary from lodge to lodge and are learned through oral transmission from elder(s) leading the ceremony. Within the lodge, protocols follow natural laws and the spirit of the rocks, water, willows, and medicines are acknowledged by first asking them to assist in the healing ceremony.

*b) Natural laws*

The Oxford Dictionary defines natural law as a body of unchanging moral principles regarded as inherent in all human beings and forming a basis for human conduct. These moral principles we are gifted with at birth from the Creator/Great Spirit. In ceremony, we honour and acknowledge the spirit world first. Prayers are said to the spirit of the grandmother and grandfather rocks, the water, the willows, and Mother Earth asking for help to heal us during the ceremony. Natural laws are directly related to the Indigenous Cree three-tiered system where a belief in the spirit world governs the basis of human conduct. Meili (1991) interviews thirty-one different elders across Alberta; elders talk on numerous subjects such as healing, environmental issues, dreams, good and bad spirits, natural laws, animals, and sweat lodges. On the topic of natural laws, Lightning (1991) says:

The humans' inner natures are an exact copy of the nature of the universe, and deep knowledge of the self comes from nature. Western society's materialism and technology is unnatural to the point that many people are unaware of natural cycles and energies and even fear insects, animals, trees, and birds. As humans become unbalanced, so does their world. (Lightning 1991:83).

Literature on Indigenous spirituality all speaks about the natural world and the function of spirits as integral to Indigenous cosmology, epistemologies, and ontology as the heart of Indigenous identity and way of life.

## Chapter Two: Theory/ Literature Review

### Introduction

This chapter combines the theory and the literature review. The theoretical framework and literature review juxtaposes two worldviews, colonialism and Native spirituality. An Indigenous Cree three-tiered universe is used as a base conceptual model to explain the natural order of Native spirituality and how society has inverted this natural order to create an historical process of spiritual fragmentation. This Indigenous universe is described in Section 2.2 of this chapter. The Indigenous model serves as an epistemological framework from which the theory and literature review for this research springs. The perspective underpinning of this thesis is that the “spirit” of colonialism has entered the lodge. The logic behind the choice of relevant literature is to demonstrate the process by which humanity has separated from the greater spirituality of the universe through scientific, mathematical, and political reasoning. I also include literature written by Native and non-Native religious and spiritual scholars who have argued against spiritual fragmentation and demonstrate how all creation including humans are part of a large interconnected spiritual web.

Literature shows that the process of spiritual fragmentation began long ago and continues today in spite of attempts to heal this spiritual wound. This spiritual rupture continues to deepen, as its subtle purpose is to separate and move the human spirit away from the spirituality of the universe. Results from this collection of data will demonstrate how the social phenomenon I refer to as Spirit Piracy is observed within Native sweat lodge ceremonies.

To reach an understanding on how Spirit Piracy has taken place, the literature review focuses on four main areas: 1) the roots and continuation of spiritual fragmentation; 2) the clash between colonial and Native spiritual cosmologies; 3) protocols and natural laws; and 4) the importance of the natural world in Native spirituality.

The research problem focuses on participants' behaviour around the traditional Native sweat lodge ceremony that demonstrates a lack of understanding about protocols and the natural laws of the universe. The social phenomenon of Spirit Piracy stems from an age-old inversion of original instructions as set by the Creator/Great Spirit where humans were to pray to and revere the natural world. Due to established colonial paradigms, we now live in a cultural environment, which places spirit and the sacred second to human wills and desires. Brunner (1937:493) asserts that, "For the origin of this habit of thought, which regards everything solely from a detached objective point of view, lies, as has already been suggested, in the fact that man has forgotten his position as part of creation, and has set himself up as Creator and master." Thus, the inversion of the natural order of the universe is fundamental to the process of spiritual fragmentation.

Through some interpretations of the Christian religion, humans gave legitimacy to dominion over nature and science places humans in a position to manipulate nature. Furthermore, by way of the process of spiritual fragmentation, the scientific experiment and colonialism gave humans permission to control each other, land, and the natural world. It also can be argued that humans of all cultures, including Indigenous peoples, throughout time have done this. Tinker (2004) reconciles violence in this manner,

Violence cannot be perpetrated, a life taken, in a Native American society, without some spiritual act of reciprocation. I am so much a part of the whole of creation and its balance, anything I do to perpetrate an act of violence, even a necessary act of violence like hunting or harvesting, must be accompanied by an act of spiritual reciprocation intended to restore the balance of existence. Hence hunting and war typically involved a ceremonial preparation before a contingent of warriors left their home. (Tinker 2004:19).

For the purpose of this thesis, I have narrowed this scope to the impact of colonialism on Native peoples, cultures, and spiritual practices. Spiritual fragmentation has been negatively normalized to a point where people are confused about what sacred really means in society today.

The first section, “the roots of continuation of spiritual fragmentation” is further subdivided into: a) the inversion of Judaic teachings (ca. 2000 BCE)<sup>4</sup> in what Brunner (1937) identifies as the “divine imperative”; b) the scientific experiment (1550-1650); and c) colonialism (1500’s-present). These subcategories show how the history of spiritual fragmentation begins in Europe and moves to North America. The second section, “the clash between colonial and Native spiritual cosmologies,” also is subdivided into two parts: a) resistance and b) healing.

We begin by reviewing the literature focusing on the roots of spiritual fragmentation of Westerners and Aboriginal peoples to demonstrate how spiritual fragmentation from outside the lodge has made its way inside the lodge.

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<sup>4</sup> What is identified as “Judaism,” was not known by this term back in history. Placed on a time continuum, there are six stages of development leading to the present term of Judaism: 1) Abrahamic 2000-1300 BCE; 2) Israelite 1300-586 BCE; 3) Second Temple Judaism 586 BCE-70 CE; 4) Rabbinic Judaism 70–640 CE; 5) Medieval Judaism 640–1787; and 6) Modern Judaism 1787 to present.

## 2.1 Roots and continuation of spiritual fragmentation

Ancient religions teach that a Supreme Being created all. This Being or Sacred Energy is known by many names: God, Creator/Great Spirit, Allah, and Jehovah to mention a few. Human beings were created last and given instruction by the Supreme Being to care for the land, waters, air, and all its sacred organisms. Humans interpreted these teachings to suit their own needs, thus created a spiritual breach that I refer to as spiritual fragmentation. Whether knowingly or unknowingly, this is accomplished through the act of Spirit Piracy—it is the human violation of natural laws—it is the de-spiriting of the sacred.

### *a) The Divine Imperative*

The *Divine Imperative* is a term coined by Emil Brunner (1937) that refers to a Christian<sup>5</sup> ethical dilemma between human behaviour and sacred teachings. Brunner (1937:132) states that, “The basis of the Divine Command is always the same, but its content varies with varying circumstances...The will of God is made known to us in His revelations in Jesus Christ as a single will which always and everywhere wills the same.” The Divine Imperative (Brunner 1937:391) is applicable to a passage in the Book of Genesis and reads: Gen 1:28 “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the

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<sup>5</sup> The characterization of Christianity in this thesis is not meant to generalize all Christian religions as failing to observe sacred teachings. The use of the “divine imperative” is meant to draw attention to a misinterpretation of the word “dominion” to “domination” that reverses ontological responsibilities from the sacred to placing the self in a position of power over all beings. I believe that members of various Christian faiths would also disagree with the violation of sacred teachings.



sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”<sup>6</sup>

Over the years, the word “dominion” was defined to become “domination” over land, animals, air, and water—the natural order was upset by human interpretation. Thus, in the words of Brunner (1937:387), “in civilization man never seeks solely to secure the necessities of life, but in his dominion over nature he seeks an inward release from bondage to it, an expression of his superiority over nature.” The assumption is that human beings are superior to other living creatures and the natural world. This is an inversion of the Divine Command. In the words of Mander (2003):

The original instructions direct that we who walk about on Earth are to express a great respect, an affection and a gratitude toward all the spirits which create and support Life...When people cease to respect and express gratitude for these many things, then all life will be destroyed, and human life on this planet will come to an end ... The Indo-European people who have colonized our lands have shown very little respect for the things that create and support Life. We believe that these people ceased their respect for the world a long time ago. Many thousands of years ago, all the people of the world believed in the same Way of Life, that of harmony with the Universe. All lived according to the Natural Ways. (Mander 2003:65).

Humans were created last—after the sky, water, and land—the rocks, trees, plants and animals. Thus, the assumption of this research is that the rock people, the tree people, the winged-ones, the pawed-ones, the finned-ones, and the hooped animals have a closer relationship to the Creator spirit. They have an inherent knowledge of the spiritual interconnection to the universe. Humans placed themselves in a position of power to

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<sup>6</sup> Bible, King James Version. Genesis: Chapter 1, <http://www.blueletterbible.org/kjv/Gen/Gen001.html> (16 February 2007).

dominate the natural world, which began the inversion of original instructions and the human movement away from the spirituality of the universe. This is based in a belief of superiority over all of creation, which is actually a rebellion against God/the Creator. According to the divine imperative, animals have an inherent right to life and to procreate. Likewise, this sacred agreement (from an Indigenous perspective) also includes the Great Spirit's command to the animals to give up their lives to feed other animals and people. People are to give thanks to the spirit of the animal. Hence, there is a reciprocal agreement between all organisms that give up their lives and for those that take them.

Reference to this sacred agreement appears in the story of "*How the Rabbit Turns White*" as told by Martin (1985) in the following section. Also next is the juxtaposition between colonial and indigenous worldviews where the Scientific Revolution in Europe (15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries) rendered animals as "automata" (like machines without thoughts or feelings). Brunner (1937:493) reminds humans that, "When man forgets that even he, in spite of his freedom through knowledge, is himself a creature, a created being, and not a creator, then he misunderstands his connexion with the rest of the creation." Scientific experimentation on animals explored in the next section demonstrates how the sacred relationship between humans and animals is de-spirited, as the spirit of the animals is negated.

#### *b) The Scientific Experiment*

The following section demonstrates how the spiritual divide between humans and animals was contributed to by way of the scientific experiment. During the scientific

revolution Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), “transformed mechanistic dominance tendencies already prevalent in his own society into a total program advocating the control of nature for human benefits”—Bacon is known for prying the secrets from nature to fulfill his mandate of dominance” (Merchant 2003:39). In Descartes’ (1596-1650) Cartesian Dualism lay the “belief that mind and matter are essentially different substances subject to different laws,” and that this philosophical dualism that enabled him to separate scientific inquiry from religious thought and to treat the world of nature as a mechanical one, operating strictly according to mathematical law” (Knoebel 1988:20). Plants and animals were not considered to have within them spirits like humans; they were automata, like machines without a brain, without feelings. Within this assumption lay the idea that human beings could now finish what God started. Mistaken Chief (2004:105-106) adds, “Eurocentred scientists dissect the herb and extract the elements of the herb that they have found to have medicinal properties. However, what they don’t understand is that the plant functions as a whole—other properties of the plant may be important because of their cleansing functions.”

Taboos and boundaries that define and protect the sacred in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are either not well known or no longer exist. We see spiritual fragmentation when the spirit of plants is negated. For example, Western science takes pharmaceutical compounds extracted from plants without regard for the spirit of the plant that is meant to heal the spirit of the person. The plant is objectified through the Western scientific experiment—“in this way Western thought has become profoundly fragmented” (Peat 1994:262). “Because plants hold the power to heal, they play essential roles as conduits or bridges to the spirit world of nature” (Cajete 2000:119).

From an Indigenous perspective, humans have a duty to pray to the spirit of plants and animals to ensure a balance between themselves and the natural world that provides life. Martin (1984) recounts a story where *Wesakechuk*, the Cree trickster figure tells the story of “Why the Rabbit Turns White.” This story reminds us of our agreement (also part of the divine imperative) with the Creator/Great Spirit that humans are to pray to the spirits of the animals who give up their lives to feed the people. In the story, *Wesakechuk* forgets to tell the humans that they are to pray and give thanks to the animals that give up their lives to feed them; as a consequence, the animals leave and go to the Great River in the North. The starving people seek the help of *Wesakechuk* asking why the animals have gone away. *Wesakechuk* finds the animals and talks to *Musqua* (the bear because he is most like the humans)—this is when *Musqua* tells *Wesakechuk* that the people have not been giving thanks to animals. So *Wesakechuk* relays the message to the humans and restores the bond between the two. Applying this story as a teaching in today’s society, we see that there are consequences to forgetting about the Creator’s original instructions, which are interpreted as taboos. Taboos are associated with tribal beliefs and are recounted in stories. Forgetting stories and the lessons they teach is a process of spiritual fragmentation because these stories and the associated consequences are no longer taken seriously as having spiritual consequences.

Smith (1999:97) argues that, “Fragmentation is not an indigenous project; it is something we are recovering from our lives.” As a consequence to spirit fragmentation, Wells (1994:48) says that what is taking place is not “reasoned discourse but a visceral response, an emotional reaction” to the loss of the sacred observed in post-modernity. Spiritual fragmentation continues today because it is a pattern seared into our

consciousness. The original teachings by the Creator/Great Spirit have long been forgotten, thus spiritual fragmentation is deeply ingrained in many of us and that is why we feel so much pain. Attempts to heal from this spiritual rupture over millennia are counter-attacked with the furthering and deepening of this spiritual wound.

*c) Colonization and Colonialism*

The process of colonization and colonialism as we see next is a man-made construction that situates humans in a position of power over the sacred and one that contradicts natural laws. How the issues of colonialism inform this study is in identifying a continuous process that allows for spiritual fragmentation. I have therefore placed under the umbrella of colonialism, the scientific experiment and religious misinterpretations of sacred teachings to form a time continuum that traces a path of spiritual fragmentation in history, which continues today. The greatest consequence of colonialism to Aboriginal peoples is located in spiritual ruptures, loss of land, and cultural norms. However, as Lightning pointed out, “we cannot blame everything on colonialism as we are responsible for teaching our children about our culture and ceremonies” (Lightning: pers. comm., 30 December 2008). Again, my reason for situating colonialism as the umbrella term is that it is more recent in history and demonstrates a process of spiritual fragmentation that began centuries ago.

Ponting (1997:8-54) outlines various processes leading to the colonization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada: “Internal colonialism” (Blauner 1969:395; Frideres 1993:3-8) and “Internalized colonization” (Perley 1993:119), First Nation Policies and Treaties; Assimilation; Christianity; Residential Schools; and Commodification of

Culture. The root word “internal” is critical to understanding the process of colonization that takes place within an individual unit or collective body. Colonialism is self-propelling and ultimately seeks to supplant Indigenous ways of life in favour of Western ideologies. Colonization itself has a spirit of its own in the same way that thought, dreams, and people do. This is observed in various aspects on how internal colonization is identified (Ponting 1997:8).

The main assumption of colonialism is that its view of culture and reality is dominant to all others. Bernstein (2000:242) defines “colonization as the settlement of new territory by a group of people; and colonialism as the process whereby colonial rule was imposed on peoples of a different land by those who settled there.” Colonial rule was not only imposed on Aboriginal lands, but also on the mind, language, customs, social structure, spiritual belief systems, and food sources. In addition to this there was the introduction of foreign plants and animals, and the pillage and plunder of natural resources.

The take over of Aboriginal lands by Colonial groups resulted in devastating effects on Aboriginal culture. Ponting (1997:436) noted, “That loss of connection with the land also constituted a spiritual wounding or disconnection, for the relationship with land and its creatures and spirits is pivotal in most aboriginal religions.” Bird (*Omuskego Cree*) (2005: 49-51) believes that the fur trade, “Change[d] the cultural conservation, the respect for environment, the respect to the animals, and respect of the human ... That’s the impact [of colonization] . . . . So that’s not our culture, no it’s not. It’s caused from the fur trade.” Points in history that furthered the process of spiritual fragmentation are observed through Christianization, Indian residential schools systems, and loss of

Aboriginal languages. These examples demonstrate how colonialism is the overlay of a way of life over another through domination, oppression, and suppression.

The *Report on Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) describes the impact of colonialism on Aboriginal Peoples of Canada as profound:

Perhaps the most appropriate term to describe that impact is 'displacement'. Aboriginal peoples were displaced physically — they were denied access to their traditional territories and in many cases actually forced to move to new locations selected for them by colonial authorities. They were displaced socially and culturally, subject to intensive missionary activity and the establishment of schools — which undermined their ability to pass on traditional values to their children, imposed male-oriented Victorian values, and attacked traditional activities such as significant dances and other ceremonies. (RCAP 1996a:4).

...Aboriginal peoples lost control and management of their own lands and resources, and their traditional customs and forms of organization were interfered with in the interest of remaking Aboriginal people in the image of the newcomers (RCAP 1996a:4).

The implementation of government policies such as Canada's *Indian Act Relocation Legislation* forced Aboriginal peoples onto allotted reserve lands denying access to traditional hunting and fishing grounds, and sacred places. "Relocation can be seen as part of a long and painful process of dispossession and alienation of Aboriginal societies from the land and from the cultural and spiritual roots it nurtures" (RCAP 1996b: 102).

Sweat lodges situated on all lands of special and spiritual significance (such as lands where vision quests have taken place) make for powerful ceremonies, as the land is home to ancestral spirits whom can be called into the lodge (Deloria 2004:86; Wilson 2008:86-88). It is believed that certain places are spiritual vortexes and doorways to the spirit world. When access is denied, transmission of spiritual knowledge is disrupted.

Canadian government and church run residential and industrial schools for Native students (1838-1996) created the greatest rupture in the transmission of cultural knowledge, love and teachings from parents and grandparents that build self-confidence and self-worth (AFN 2008). Children were forcibly removed from their family to attend these schools as part of the *Gradual Civilization Act* (1857). Parents and grandparents who resisted were either jailed or fined. Many children died in these schools through the spread of infectious diseases such as smallpox, whooping cough, and poor living conditions as reported by Canada's Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce (Milloy 1999:77). Children were denied love, security, and parenting skills from family members. Children speaking their Native tongue met with punishment. Many children suffered trauma from physical, emotional, mental, and sexual abuses inflicted on them often times by members of clergy. The cumulative effect of residential schools on Aboriginal populations resulted in losses of tribal languages, cultural identities, and the transfer of cultural and spiritual knowledge through ceremonies. Furthermore, historical trauma, intergenerational trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder are common among Aboriginal peoples who experienced physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuses while attending residential schools (Warry 2007:61; Brave Heart & LeBruyn 1998:56). "Long after a [traumatic] event, many traumatized people feel that a part of themselves has died" (Herman 1992:49). The "basic trust [in] the foundation of belief in the continuity of life, the order of nature, and the transcendent order of the divine" is broken (Herman 1992:51-52).

The process of decolonization is meant to reverse and heal the wounds from the effects of colonization. However, Smith (1999:14) argues that scholars are skeptical of



terms such as decolonization, post-modernity, and post-colonialism stating that, “Many indigenous intellectuals actively resist participating in any discussion within the discourses of post-coloniality. This is because post-colonialism is viewed as a convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world.” Whitt (1995:169) reminds us that, “history is not only written from a particular standpoint, but that that standpoint has been of the colonizers, not the colonized.” In the words of Wilmot (2005:12), “we white activists often seem to interpret ‘taking responsibility’ as ‘taking over’.”

Neo-colonialism refers to the continuation of colonization through patterns of control and domination of others, land, and natural resources. Nkrumah (1965: xi) defined neo-colonialism in Ghana, West Africa as “the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress.” The New Age movement of the 1980’s is a representation of misappropriated Native traditions and cultural knowledge turning it into a capital venture—such as commercializing the sweat lodge ceremony. In the colonial worldview, there is a belief in a right to take over Native customs and spiritual practices with a sense of entitlement to do so (Hernández-Ávila 1996:343-346). Presumptuous sweat-lodgers new to these ceremonial ways often tell Native elders or experienced Native lodgers how to sit or defiantly insist on upsetting a ceremony because they believe in a “right” to do so.

In the next section we see how the clash between two opposing worldviews continues as the Cree three-tiered universe is overlaid by the colonial paradigm.

## **2.2 The clash between colonial and Native worldviews**

The clash between colonial and Native worldviews is rooted in age-old differences of opposing spiritual belief systems. In the colonial worldview, the physical world is considered separate from the spirit realm. Conversely, in the Native worldview there is no division between the physical and spirit world and the Creator/Great Spirit remains superior to all creation. In the words of Cajete (2000:69), “Every act, element, plant, animal, and natural process is considered to have a moving spirit with which humans continuously communicate.” Native resistance to colonialism is about protecting what they believe—a belief that embodies the Creator spirit and a relationship to the natural world.

The conceptual mode of this thesis as mentioned is based in a Cree three-tiered universe of a spiritual belief system where the physical world of sacred land with all organisms is the lowest level, the spirit world of ancestors in the middle and the highest level is of animal spirits and the Creator Spirit (Mandelbaum 1979:302; Young et al. 1989:25). The Wind River Shoshoni in Wyoming have a similar “three world levels, upper world, middle world, and underground world” (Hultkrantz 1987:287). However, some “Plains Cree averre[d] that there were four heavenly tiers” (Mandelbaum 1979:302). A four-tiered universe includes the underground or water world, the physical world plus the spirit world above and the highest level of the Creator spirit. This underground world and water world draws from creation stories about how the world was created. There are many versions of multiple tiered universes among Indigenous peoples, but what is important to remember is that each level interacts simultaneously with one another in a vertical order and that this is a natural and fixed order set by the

Creator/Great Spirit. Therefore, humans can never be equal to or above the level of the Creator Spirit or ancestral spirits.

Since the arrival of Europeans to Canada, colonial worldviews have been imposed on those of Native peoples. This caused resistance in the past and continues to do so today. By the same token, attempts to heal from spiritual fragmentation are almost as old as the wounds themselves. Religious philosophers and spiritual leaders have written about the need for humans to reconnect to their spirituality for centuries—the focus of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to renew our interconnectedness with the environment in a spiritual way. The following summary of literature demonstrates the ongoing struggle of resistance and healing.

*a) Resistance*

Native resistance to colonialism and government policies is as long as the history of European occupation in Canada and continues into the present (Armstrong 1998; Battiste & Henderson 2000; Niezen 2000; Dickason 2002; Wright 2003). Research in Development Studies and Political Science conclude that the longer the history of colonization, the longer it takes for the process of decolonization to occur (Allen & Thomas 2000). LaRocque (1999:39-41) points out that several Native resistance writers, in a multitude of disciplines, started “writing back” (Smith 1999:23) since in the mid-1800’s such as Copway (1847) and Johnson (1917). They were opposing Western ideologies that tried to position Aboriginal ways of life as inferior.

Resistance writers Sartre (2006), Smith (1999), Friere (1968), and Fanon (1961, 1952) took up the challenge to deconstruct colonial thought anew in the twentieth

century. Algerian scholars Sartre and Fanon both wrote against the French and argued that their human rights were violated through the effects of colonialism. They also claimed that resistance to colonial oppression was often met with more oppression. Overall, oppression results in poverty, violence, and low self-esteem. Duran (2006:9) states that violence of thought and action appears in the form of “epistemic violence.” It is along this same line that I argue the “spirit of colonialism” has entered the lodge in the form of internalized colonization.

An attack on the Native sweat lodge came in the form of government policy when ceremonies were banned in the late 1800’s. The political threat against First Nations ceremonies was made official when an amendment to the *Indian Act* of Canada banned the Potlatch of the West Coast peoples in 1885 (Niezen 2000:136). Subsequently, all ceremonial dances such as the Blackfoot Sun Dance and the Cree and Saulteaux Thirst Dance were banned in 1895.<sup>7</sup> Although not “officially” banned, Aboriginal people were discouraged from engaging in such ceremonies as the shaking tent and sweat lodge (Dickason 2002:265-266). “There are accounts of First Nations people living in the Treaty #3 reservation area in northern Ontario who tell stories of hiding in the bush for fear of imprisonment for leading such lodges” (Freeman 2000:390). All bans on First Nations ceremonies were lifted one half century later in 1951. The main reason for these bans was primarily to “eliminate ‘barbarous’ customs. Little or no effort was made to

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<sup>7</sup> According to Dempsey (1997:34), “The Peigan tribe in Canada is called the *aputoksi-pikuni* or North Peigans, while those in Montana are the *amiskapi-pikuni* or South Peigans. Today the Canadian group is known simply as the “Peigans” while their southern relatives are officially incorporated as the “Blackfoot Tribe of Montana.” Thus, the Blackfoot are located in Canada, while the Blackfeet are in the United States.

understand ritual symbolism, the meaning of songs, or the importance of gathering” (Niezen 2000:128).

Literature on the topic of the New Age movement and its interest in Native sweat lodge ceremonies for commercialization generated a strong counter-attack by Native scholars: Smith (2004), Welch (2002), Aldred (2000), Niezen (2000), Donaldson (1999), Deloria (1998), Whitt (1995), Rose (1992), and Greene (1988).

Many non-Native Americans seem to feel an entitlement regarding Native American [and First Nations] ceremonial and cultural traditions, artifacts, and gravesites, including ancestral bones, that can only be understood in the context of the original entitlement the first colonizers felt toward this land by ‘right of conquest’ and soon after, ‘Manifest Destiny.’ This entitlement assumes the right to take what is indigenous, with complete disregard for Native peoples, in a manner in which the perpetrators would not think of doing so easily with other traditions. (Hernández-Ávila 1996:343).

Cook-Lynn (2007:xiii) argues that “writing in Indian Country is a sacred responsibility if the nations are to protect sovereignty ... in truth, neutrality has no agency in Indian-White relations or in the broader relations of the universe.” Studies in post-colonial/modernist theory strive to dismantle colonial history and give voice to the oppressed. Battiste (2000:xix) defines post-colonial Indigenous thought as “emerg[ing] from the inability of Eurocentric theory to deal with the complexities of colonialism and its assumptions.” There are contradictions and difficulties in unpacking the intricacies and definitions of words such as colonialism, post-colonialism, and de-colonization because they are written from within a Western context which conflict with Indigenous belief systems. Difficulty lies in attempting to sort out the meaning of words within the English language. Native elders continue to argue that language is critical to

understanding another person's reality. Indigenous languages contain within them a spiritual reality because words carry spirit.<sup>8</sup> A word is given life through the breath by which it is expelled. Since breath has life, a spoken word (or a word in thought) is given life by the spirit within the breath.

Unfortunately, as society tries to move to a place of healing, we also see the continuation of spiritual fragmentation at work—like a self-propelled entity that has a life of its own. Hence the process of spiritual fragmentation also has a spirit of its own—it is alive. Healing at the level of government in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is taking place, but it is healing of the individual consciousness that needs to happen to repair from spiritual fragmentation. Society will only arrest pirating the spirit of people, places, and things when it realizes that wounding the spiritual life force energy harms the entire universal system including humans, animals, and the rest of creation.

### *b) Healing*

In attempts to heal religious wounds of the past, Churches and Governments are taking responsibility for wrongs committed against First Nations people in residential schools in the form of formal apologies and financial compensation (Bavelas 2004; Indian Residential Schools 2008; Harper 2008). Here we see the cracking of the “veneer of Western thought” and an awakening of social consciousness, acknowledgement, and responsibility.

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<sup>8</sup> Note that all other languages also contain spirit.

According to Harrod (2000:xxv), “there is a hunger among many contemporary people for a recovery of ritual relationships between humans and the natural sources of their lives—plants, animals, and the earth itself.” As the earth goes through rapid environmental changes, society is more aware of its “ecological footprint” than ever. Seekers of spiritual answers turn to Indigenous philosophies among many others for guidance, but colonial worldviews based in economics often overshadow spiritual reason. Therefore, elders bear the burden of teaching ancient traditions and values while healing themselves from cultural genocide, which often leaves the younger generations with the task of reconstructing the pieces of a broken history in order to create a viable future. Hence, the importance of protecting Native cultural and spiritual heritages is vital as the elders are the teachers and wisdom holders of the future.

Attempts to heal from spiritual fragmentation are done from within colonial structures that place economics and capitalism and political hegemony ahead of religion and spirituality. Within the colonial paradigm, there is constant oscillation between social awakening of the spiritual consciousness and the subversion of the sacred. This has created a pattern of wounding and healing for Native and non-Native peoples alike. This pattern sees the colonial worldview as separating the human being from the spirituality of the universe, while Native cosmologies see human beings as interconnected to the natural world.

The lack of understanding about the natural order of creation is obvious today, as development projects are constructed over sacred burial grounds for hydro-electric projects, golf courses, housing complexes and commercial shopping outlets (Niezen 2000:154; Battiste & Henderson 2000:111-116). Ancestral bones of Native peoples were

unearthed and shelved in museums and private collections (McMahon 2004; Kidwell 2000:195-204; Vizenor 1986:319-331). The destruction of Mother Earth by pillaging and plunging for finite resources; poisoning waterways, land, and air for capitalistic profit; the use of food as political leverage in war; and animal cruelty are a few examples that demonstrate the lack of regard for sacred life whether human, insect, or tree. Stealing of children, crops, livestock, and slavery are other ways that demonstrated the continuation of spiritual fragmentation that has occurred amongst Native and non-Native peoples alike. Dickason (2002:49) adds that slave among the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian were “sometimes individuals who had lost status because of debt; one could also be born into slavery, one of the few regions in North America where this happened.” Reference to slaves among other Native communities in Canada and United States are discussed at length in Hodge (1906). Thus, the de-spiriting of the sacred touched all aspects of the human experience.

Daes (2000:6) extends the discussion on the effects of colonialism and how it impacts the colonizers: “Oppressive nations may win wars of conquest but their external aggression returns to haunt them in a cycle of internal mistrust, domination, and violence. In the course of mobilizing their power to dominate others, they suffer their own spiritual deaths.” Furthermore, it is possible that the spiritual death Daes talks about is related to spiritual fragmentation, internalized colonization, and the phenomenon of “white guilt.” The phenomenon of “white guilt” is not yet fully explored by Whites themselves in the context of Native spirituality.

Non-Natives who attend sweat lodge ceremonies to heal from “white guilt” express a deep and painful regret for atrocities committed against Indigenous peoples by



their ancestors. Instead of healing the pain from these emotional wounds carried from one generation to the next, people continue to lament over the pain rather than move past it. The reason why this is happening is that it is rooted in an age-old cycle of spiritual fragmentation trapped in the human psyche. People of mixed-blood also experience the internalized pain of “white guilt.” An essay by Nabokov (1987) alludes to the pain of “white guilt” he describes what is in effect internalized colonization and the consequence of spiritual fragmentation.

One who swims between cultures can get stranded from either shore. On the reservation my Indian hosts would look bewildered when I used Indian existence to pick at the scab of my own resentments. They would hear me scorn family, custom, and government, and they would seem to be thinking: This is a strange bird that defecates in his own nest. (Nabokov 1987:151).

The problem with this type of self-loathing is that it is a form of Spirit Piracy. Pirating the spirit of the self moves the human spirit away from the spirituality of the universe. It appears to manifest as an age-old habit seared into the consciousness of humanity, which never fully dissipates. Remembering the analogy of the spider’s web, when a strand is pulled and released the entire web feels the reverberation. In a similar vein, when humans realize that causing harm to any spirit or spiritual form is to wound the same sacred ‘blood energy’ that connects us all—this creates a feeling of deep fear and pain knowing that wounding the sacred is to wound our own connection to the spirituality of the universe. Therefore, when pesticides and herbicides leached into marshlands kill frogs and salamanders, we eventually drink from that same water as it is circulated through water tables and piped into our homes. When the effects of Spirit

Piracy are realized in the human consciousness, it is experienced as emotional pain at the visceral level.

Champagne (2007:327) reminds us that, “If the covenants with the Creator are broken or abandoned and people of the earth fail to honour and give thanks for the gifts of life, the earth, and the universes, the Creator will not provide guidance and the universe will experience disharmonies that might be dangerous to human survival and well-being.” Thus, the cycle of colonialism continues where there is resistance and objectification of the sacred. The repeating pattern of healing and wounding goes on; an age-old wound is kept open. It has been a human experience. It is not specific to one group. No group has been exempt from it. Healing five hundred years of colonization begins with healing individual consciousnesses. This means returning to the natural order as set by the Creator.

The next section addresses the importance of the natural world in Native spirituality where protocols and natural laws are recognized as central to Native cosmologies. Human beings are to revere the natural world and see ourselves as part of the larger cosmic picture.

### **2.3 The importance of the natural world in Native spirituality**

Literature on Native spirituality collectively speaks about the natural world and the role of spirits as integral to Native cosmology, epistemologies, and ontology as it is the heart of all Indigenous cultural identities and ways of life. In the words of Cajete (2000:14), “the essence of Native spirituality is not religion in the Western sense of the word, but rather a set of core beliefs in the sanctity of personal and community relationships to the

natural world, which are creatively acted upon and expressed at both the personal and communal levels.” This sanctity is animated through prayer and ceremony either alone or group celebrations where the spirit world is acknowledged as a living entity.

Therefore, how grandmothers and grandfather rocks, rattles, and bear medicine are treated inside the lodge is a direct reflection of an intimate understanding of natural laws and conduct with the natural world outside the lodge.

The natural world is considered to have the same spiritual life force energy running through it as the Creator/Great Spirit created all. “Indigenous science holds that there is no separation between an individual and society, between matter and spirit, between each one of us and the whole of nature” (Peat 1994:6). It is not possible to separate the self from the spirit that lives in mountains, clouds, wind, flowers, the sun, moon, and stars. Why our relationship to the natural world is important is that we replenish and renew our own spiritual energy from the greater spirituality of the universe. “Ceremonies of healing are not just in words; they are in music, song, smells, and movement; they are in objects and rituals” (Hammerschlag 1993:67).

Creation stories are cosmologies that tell of the origin of the universe. These involve the sky, land, water, and underground worlds (Schrempp 1998:15-27). We come to know about Native epistemology and philosophy through prayers, ceremonies, dreams, and the sharing of stories. Although the physical and spirit worlds are interconnected, ceremonies amplify the spiritual communication between them. Taking part in ceremonies such as the sweat lodge, Sun Dance, shaking tent, vision quest, and fasting is

to be in direct contact with the spiritual energies of the cosmic world.<sup>9</sup> “The ceremony itself includes not just our own prayers and stories of what brought us to it, but includes the unspoken records of history, the mystic past, and all the other lives connected to ours, our family, nations, and all other creatures” (Hogan 1992:33).

Elder George Head of the Great Whale Rider nation recounts legends where “the animals and men talk to each other ... all things, animate and inanimate alike, were invested with a spirit, called *puwakin*, that actuated a mentality similar to their own ... man could freely communicate with his kindred—be it animal, rock, or tree—each of which had the same thoughts and emotions as human beings” (Head 1971:12-13). Few animals speak with words today but they still have the ability to communicate with humans. Animals, rocks, eagle feathers, drums, and rattles communicate with humans through thoughts, feelings, intuition, and dreams.

Anthropologist Mandelbaum (1979:303) wrote, “Among the Naskapi, every object, no matter how simple, has its patron spirit. There are spirits of animals, birds, fishes, insects, and plants. Any of them may be propitiated in order that men may benefit from them.” These patron spirits are considered gifts from the Creator. We ensure a respectful relationship is cultivated between the human and its relative whether that is with a person, plant, or animals. For example, before a healer picks herbs, tobacco is

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<sup>9</sup> Sweat lodge and shaking tent ceremonies can last up to several hours and are completed the same day. Sweat lodges take place in a dome-shaped structure with several participants in attendance, while the structure of the shaking tent is upright holding only one person, the medicine person. Sun Dances and vision quests last four days; participants are without food or water during the entire time. Sun Dances are done in large groups, while vision quests are done individually in isolation. Fasting is done individually as well and generally for a minimum of four days also without food or water. All ceremonies are meant to attain spiritual renewal.

offered to the plant. “We always give thanks; we acknowledge the herbs, berries, and the trees for their gifts. We offer tobacco and pray before we pick the berries”—this is a protocol of the “natural law of reciprocity” (Bastien 2004:82).

The link between tobacco and the spirit world is found in a Mohawk origin story where “Sky Woman” descends to Earth bringing with her Strawberry and Tobacco plants (Kulchyski 1999:108-110). The origin story of “Sky Woman” also is found in other Aboriginal cultures such as the Iroquois and Creek. The tobacco plant is sacred because it connects the spirit world to the earth world. “The smoke from burning tobacco naturally rises and can touch the spirits of the sun and wind. The smoke carries one’s prayers to the Creator. “Tobacco smoke may also be used to purify the body, mind and soul, as well as other sacred and ceremonial objects” (Waldram 1997:97).

Tobacco is a sacred plant for virtually all indigenous peoples... In many indigenous world views, the spirit world is the highest form of existence as it is the place where ancestors went when they died...In a political context, smoking the pipe represents the solemnity of taking responsibility for one’s words. (Turner 2006:52).

The Crees up here, when they didn’t have tobacco, used to use red willow shavings, and that represented tobacco...The whole idea of giving it back to Mother Earth is that you have to open up, get in a state of mind where you’ll be talking with or getting help from the spiritual world. (Young 1989:60).

According to Peat (1994),

Plants contain spirit, and in using them one is essentially entering into relationships with the powers and energies of another world” ... “Coming-to-knowing means entering into relationships with the spirits of knowledge, with plants and animals, with beings that animate dreams and visions, and with the spirit of the people.” (Peat 1994:65).

...Oneida scholar Pamela Colorado (1988:46) coined the term “Indigenous science” and describes it as, “a state of balance which is at the heart of the universe and the spirit of the science. (Peat 1994:120).

Buffalo stones (*iniskim*), for example, are rocks that have special powers to whistle and speak as noted in the writings by Grinnell on Blackfoot legends (Grinnell 2003:125-126; Wissler & Duvall 1995:85-87). How is this knowledge understood in the colonial context? Surely a Western scientist would want to put the buffalo stone through a scientific experiment in the hope of reproducing a whistle, but chances are that the spirit of the stone would hide only to reveal itself on its own terms.

Academic literature and resources in Native communities that supports the importance of the natural world in Native spirituality is endless. *Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History* is an excellent source of historical accounts of Native ceremonies. However, it should be noted that readers must discern Western ideologies from Indigenous worldview on spirituality, as historical writers wrote from outside the lodge not familiar or agreeing with Indigenous epistemologies. LaRocque (1988:199) cautions readers against “the ‘dichotomy of civilization versus savagery’ that is pervasive in historical documents and popular literature written on native peoples.” When Native and non-Native scholars have filled library shelves of supporting evidence to show the importance of the natural world to human life, how is it that so many people fail to understand?

The process of spiritual fragmentation continues today. It has been a long journey since the first century 30 CE<sup>10</sup> when Judaic teachings were distorted creating a man-made rift, a movement away from the human spirit and the spirituality of the universe. In Chapter 5, on the *Principle of Spirit Piracy*, it is noted that the sweat lodge ceremony has transitioned over time, but the protocol of praying to the spirit world remains unchanged. When adhering to protocols of natural laws, participants communicate with the spirit world and the emotionality<sup>11</sup> (or emotional energy) of the universe reveals itself in the form of “blue lights.”

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<sup>10</sup> CE is an abbreviation for “Christian or Common Era.”

<sup>11</sup> The word “emotionality” is a derivative noun of the word emotion. I use the word emotionality interchangeably with emotional energy. This is the same spiritual quality of emotion that is felt in the sweat lodge ceremony that is equivalent to the indescribable love of the Creator Spirit.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### Introduction

Qualitative research techniques were used to obtain information addressing the issue of Spirit Piracy. Set in the context of the traditional Native sweat lodge ceremony in Western Canada, a survey method was used to interview seven Native elders and one non-Native herbalist around this ancient spiritual practice. Indigenous research methodologies include narrative inquiry and storytelling and storylistening skills (Barton 2004:519-526; Wilson 2008:32). The current research strategy is “inductive, flexible, and open-ended” compatible with Indigenous knowledge often gained through dreams, visions, and communication with the spirit world (Stebbins 2001:4-7).

The use of narrative inquiry to gather the research data is characteristic of acquiring knowledge from Native elders. Elders speak through storytelling, which requires a learner to develop storylistening skills. Embedded in each interview is the use of stories that tell of personal experiences with the spirit world. I begin this research with sharing four stories of my experiences in sweat lodges to demonstrate examples of Spirit Piracy and one story in particular on the beauty of the spirit world, that of “blue rocks.” The story about the “blue rocks” demonstrates the power of the universe in revealing its emotionality. Witnessing the emotionality of the universe is life changing and confirmatory that we as human beings are not alone for we have the love of the Creator and ancestral spirits who walk with us.

Stories told by the respondents hold within them reference to human interaction with the spirit world. A skeptic might doubt the believability of the spiritual stories shared by the respondents, but as part of developing storylistening skills a person must



develop spiritual ears and a heightened sense of intuition to hear spirit within words. Each respondent's contribution to the study brought diversity of knowledge; some evidence was contradictory (due to the nuances of protocols among Native groups), while overall there was a consensus among all the Native elders that indicates a problematic social phenomenon is happening around Native sweat lodge ceremonies today.

The Indigenous Cree multi-tiered universe sets the foundation for speaking about the interaction between sweat lodge participants and the entrance of spirits from the four cardinal doorways. Reference to the Indigenous paradigm opened the dialogue to learn about the "four levels of spiritual communication" among the Cree as shared by Manitopyes (2008). Describing the overlap of a colonial worldview on the Indigenous framework came as no surprise to the Native respondents. This created a space for the elders to express their views on very important issues surrounding the ceremonial practice of the sweat lodge.

The use of narrative inquiry as a research methodology was appropriate to the content of the study as a bridge between the sweat lodge ceremony, Indigenous epistemologies, and experiential knowledge acquired from working with the spirit world. Storytelling provided a familiar mode of communication for the Native elders to talk about the importance of spirituality in society today. One interview was conducted while sitting in the sweat lodge. This allowed for a slowing effect in a world that otherwise "rushes at a very fast pace" (Soft White Cloud Woman: pers. comm., 8 August 2007) and framed the interview in the ceremonial setting for which this study focuses on.

### 3.1 Research ethics and protocols

Maori educator, researcher, and writer Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes:

Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology. There are 'factors' to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood...Two important ways not always addressed by scientific research are to do with 'reporting back' to the people and 'sharing knowledge.' Both ways assume a principle of reciprocity and feedback. (Smith 1999:15).

When conducting research on or with Native peoples, there are three sets of ethics and protocols: the University's standards, the Native community's, and the researcher's. First, standard policy for research conducted with human subjects requires a successful application for ethics approval prior to conducting research. My research methodology involved face-to-face, one-on-one interviews with seven Native elders and one non-Native person who were knowledgeable about sweat lodge ceremonies. I received ethics approval through the University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) in July 2007, (See Appendix B). Although the University of Calgary stipulates that it is not necessary to offer participants the option of a final review of their submissions, it is common practice and standard protocol to do so when working in Native communities. Elders may take offence to this, as they may not feel a need to verify their own words since they have already signed a consent form. Therefore, it is the researcher(s)' responsibility to clearly articulate the elder's messages and understand their preferences as to research.

As part of the second set of ethics in the Native community, I revisited the Native elders to review their submissions. During the review of submissions, six of the elders chose to make changes, remove various remarks, or add further information to clarify specific points. Reviewing the submissions took anywhere from an hour to two days, which in one case involved a sweat lodge ceremony. In another case, two drafts of the submission were done to ensure correct spelling of Cree words. In all cases, reviews of the submission always included tea and food. The point I wish to make is that research in Native communities is not a one-time visit with a tape recorder. Research in and with Native communities is a collaborative work that stretches over the entire research and writing period.

A third set of ethics and protocols is that of my own. As an active participant and member of the Native community and sweat lodge ceremony, I have an ontological responsibility to conduct research that is ethical, respectful, and transparent. I am part of my own research, as a participant-observer who has participated in sweat lodge ceremonies for over thirteen years. I have been trained by Native elders and have led parts of the ceremony for the past seven years. Being part of the research opened opportunities to gather data from the research respondents that may not otherwise be attainable from a member outside of the community. I was able to gather sensitive data because I already had an established relationship with six of the respondents. The seventh participant I had met during a public event when I had conducted a nature walk, while the eighth participant I did not know beforehand and had to cultivate a relationship with him and his family prior to conducting an interview.

I believe that my social location as Métis and a practicing sweat lodger did impact the responses given by the interviewees in that Native respondents trusted my research credibility. In addition, time was saved in that elders did not have to define and explain an Indigenous cosmology to me, for it is different from a Western worldview. For instance, the natural world is considered a spiritual entity, so it is possible to speak to the wind spirit and ask for help. Although not all respondents accepted my theory of Spirit Piracy, each expressed their beliefs as was true to them. Thus in this regard, my social location was my own and did not influence the respondents' contributions. Varying points of view added to the diversity of the data gathered. There were nuances and contradictions between my position and those of the respondents as well as among themselves. I present the evidence in a respectful way, just as it was gathered. I was allowed access to sensitive information because I am known for my honesty and integrity in the community and respondents knew that I would treat what they shared in a respectful manner. Participants believed that this topic is very important thus they were willing to share about the sacredness of ceremony; likewise the challenges facing Native leaders in society today were discussed openly.

### **3.2 Research design**

The research design used in this study was an exploratory qualitative survey method. As a sole researcher, I interviewed eight participants who either lead or continue to take part in traditional sweat lodges ceremonies in an urban centre in Western Canada.

### **3.3 Instrumentation**

A series of open-ended questions were developed and pre-tested prior to entering the field. The pre-test took place with one of the elder who did not think he had anything to offer, as he stated, “I am not educated man” (meaning that he did not have a university degree). However, after sharing open-ended questions with him on my research topic, he decided to take part in the research. For this I am grateful because his contributions were invaluable. The process of pre-testing the questions actually revealed a need for clarity in my choice of words and that sub-questions would naturally arise during the interview. Once the questions were pre-tested, the open-ended questions were presented to each elder. The questions focused on protocols, natural laws, and the elders’ observations and concerns regarding social changes that have taken place around the sweat lodge ceremony over the past decade or more.

The sub-questions were used to further the understanding about protocols, natural laws, and how the ceremony has transitioned overtime. This led to an awareness of how the ‘spirit of colonialism’ has entered the lodge through our unconscious behaviours. One question led into the other with the purpose to better understand how the roots and continuation of colonialism and spiritual fragmentation has created internalized colonization, thus causing Spirit Piracy. Stories also were used to illustrate how the pirating of spirit from people, places, and things take place.

### **3.4 Sample**

A total of eleven people with a minimum of 15 years experience either as sweat lodge leaders or participants were invited to participate in this research. Ten were Native elders

and one non-Native herbalist. Of the ten Native elders, seven participated and three declined. The seven elders interviewed included four Cree (one woman, three men); one Métis woman; one Tsuu T'ina man, and one man from the Stoney Nation. Of the three who declined—one was a Blackfoot man stating that the sweat lodge is ceremonial and does not belong in academia; one Métis man initially agreed to participate but then withdrew; one Ojibwa woman who said she would participate, but repeated missed phone calls indicated that the interview was not to take place. The reason for interviewing various elders of different nations was to determine the ubiquity of Spirit Piracy. A non-Native participant also was interviewed offering a non-Native perspective for interests in Native spiritual ceremonies. I did attempt to interview three white New Age women who lead sweat lodges, but one took offence to the term New Age, while the other two women did not return my telephone calls. Had I been able to find out why the one woman took offence to the term New Age, this would have added to the value of my research.

The elders chosen for this survey were based on three criteria: 1) they were reputable and respected community elders; 2) they had a minimum of fifteen years experience leading lodges or as regular participants in sweats; and 3) all except one Native elder were people that I had previously sweat with and knew of their commitment, integrity, and dedication to serving the Creator/Great Spirit.

I first contacted each of the Native elders by phone or in person to see if they would be interested in participating in this research. For those whom I contacted by phone, I asked to meet with to discuss my project. For those I met in person, we discussed my project at that time. If elders agreed to take part in the research, an interview time was set approximately two weeks later. At the beginning of the interview,

I offered tobacco and I reiterated what my project was about. “Tobacco [is] a kind of speaking grass” and has the ability to “carry [our] prayers of the people to the spirit world, sometimes called the realm of the grandfathers” (Waugh 1996:96, 49). If the elder accepted the tobacco, it signalled a spiritual agreement between the Creator/Great Spirit, the interviewee, and the researcher to share honestly and from our hearts. The one elder whom I did not previously know took nearly a year before I met him face to face. The process began with me offering tobacco to a woman at a sweat lodge asking if she would direct me to a Cree elder who might know of the story on how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people.<sup>12</sup> The tobacco was passed onto her uncle, which was then passed on to the elder I eventually met with.

*a) Interview Protocol:*

Interviews took place in a variety of situations, for example, inside or outside the sweat lodge, in home kitchens, and living rooms. Tobacco was offered to an elder at the beginning of an interview as is customary among the Plains tribes of Canada as a ceremonial protocol. A prayer was said during the lighting and burning of a smudge to create a ceremonial setting in which to ask spirits to guide the interview. Thus, the act of smudging immediately before an interview began was very important because as Wilson (2008:11) wrote in *Research Is Ceremony*, “The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world.

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<sup>12</sup> As tobacco is considered a very powerful spirit, it has the ability to communicate messages from humans to the spirit world. The origin story of “Sky Woman” discussed in chapter 2 explains how the tobacco plant came from the sky world to earth. There are other Aboriginal renditions on how the sacred tobacco plant came to human beings.

Let us go forward together with open minds and good hearts as we further take part in this ceremony.”

Interviews lasted between 45-150 minutes. The length of the interview depended on the elders’ knowledge and experience and by what ‘Spirit’ wanted to share through them.<sup>13</sup> By the word ‘Spirit’ I refer to a spiritual energy that carries spiritual messages from the Creator. It is not uncommon for a spirit to speak through a person especially when it is during a ceremonial setting. Spirits have the power to use our voices to speak through. Good spiritual energy is experienced as warm and comfortable, whereas bad spiritual energy leaves a person feeling anxious and frightened. This will become clearer in chapter six as Native elders speak on the powers and the admonitions of the spirit world.

A one-time honorarium was paid to each participant upon completion of the interview. As a qualitative researcher on Indigenous spirituality, I exercised trust in what Spirit wished to talk about; thus, interviews were not prescriptive but followed a natural and inductive flow emerging out of the thematic questions identified earlier. Elders were given the opportunity to review their submission as the final stage of the thesis was written—if I did not hear from the participants within a two-week period of notification, I assumed there were no changes to be made.

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<sup>13</sup> When I refer to “Spirit” in this context, I mean receiving a spiritual message from the spirit realm. I may not know who the ancestral spirit is, but I know through feeling whether I am being guided in a good way. When a person is guided in a good way, a person feels warmth and comfort, while a negative spirit makes a person feel anxious and frightened. There are trickster spirits that can be play tricks on people, such as making a person sing a child’s song in place of an adult song during a sweat lodge ceremony (Lightning: pers. comm., 30 December 2008).



Language translators were not required, as all the participants carried out the interviews in English. Spoken Cree and Tsuu T'ina words during the interview were given a close to equivalent English word or term by the elder. Written translation of Cree words were done by the interviewees themselves. Many phrases and cultural concepts do not have equivalent English translations, which posed difficulty in writing Indigenous oral traditions as noted by Native scholars (Murray & Rice 1999:xiii). Nuances of spiritual epistemologies are embedded in language, the relationship to the natural world, and ceremony, thus it is not always possible to translate oral literature into written language without losing a part of the spirit contained in words and thoughts.

*b) Audio-taping Protocol:*

Audiotapes of the interview allowed me the privilege to return to the interviews for clarification. Before turning on the tape-recorder, I held the tobacco in my hand and spoke from my heart explained to each elder what my research was about.<sup>14</sup> I then read the consent form which states that a participant can withdraw from the research at any time. Having listened to my words, each elder agreed to take part in the research, accepted the tobacco and agreed to be tape-recorded. I chose to have the elders sign the consent form after the interviews. My reasons for doing this were twofold: 1) tobacco is considered more binding in the Native worldview, while “official White” documents

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<sup>14</sup> It was possible to set the tobacco down in front of the elder (grandfather) and letting the person decide whether to accept it and carry on with the interview, but my reason for holding the tobacco in my hand until the elder (grandfather) accepted or declined was meant to keep the flow of spiritual energy going in the transfer.

have historically been greeted with suspicion and mistrust; 2) signing after the interview reduced the “clinical” feeling, thus cultivated an environment of trust, mostly of me.

With written consent or consent through verbal agreement, all interviews were audio-taped. Advantages to tape-recording are: 1) The flow of a conversation is not interrupted by constant note-taking; 2) Accuracy is assured in that a researcher can unconsciously misinterpret what an elder has said, only to review the recording at a later date and reflect on a deeper message; 3) A tape-recording can be revisited for clarification; 4) Often when elders speak, their wisdom is so profound that it takes time for it to be internalized; having the opportunity to revisit the interview is extremely valuable as it can provide unique pieces of data; 5) Changes in tonality, moments of silence, laughter, and other emotions indicate changes in the dynamics of the conversation—these changes act as indicators and signal a major theme important in the research data; 6) Finally, transcribing full interviews lends itself to the analysis of the data by coding, memo-writing, and note-taking along the margins—it is through the process of this analysis that common threads begin to emerge into theory in qualitative research.

There are some downsides to audio-taping though: 1) There is a constant feeling of surveillance while the tape-recorder is on, thus the conversation can be somewhat guarded on the part of the elder and the researcher; 2) As the researcher, I would glance over to my micro-cassette player from time to time to check whether the tape was still turning; 3) The red light of the tape-recorder was a reminder of being watched, but I resolved that problem after the second interview by covering it up with a small piece of duck-tape; 4) Transcribing a tape is very time consuming – 1 hour of taped interviews

takes approximately 5 to 8 hours to transcribe – if the tape is not transcribed as soon as possible after an interview, the significance of brief silences, spontaneous laughs, or reference to hand or facial gestures may be forgotten; and 5) If Spirit does not want to be recorded, the tape will be blank which would mean having to recall from memory what an elder said—this could mean missing subtleties understood after contemplation from re-listening to a passage. A blank take could also mean that spirit does not want certain knowledge to be documented. If this was to happen, a researcher would then need to discuss this matter with an elder to decide on the best manner to deal with the situation. The problem may be technical or it may be spiritual in nature. If it is of a spiritual nature, this could mean leaving out a section of the research data. Tape-recording was not a condition of the interview and elders were welcome to decline. However, all participants understood the reasoning behind tape-recording and granted my request.<sup>15</sup>

### **3.5 Qualitative Indigenous methodology**

Qualitative techniques of exploratory research are inductive, flexible, and open-ended.

This technique is compatible with Indigenous epistemologies where knowledge is gained through dreams, intuition, visions, and communication with the spirit world. Qualitative Indigenous methodology of narrative inquiry also provides a framework to learn about protocols and natural laws of the sweat lodge through elder and participant storytelling.

Storytelling and storylistening skills are critical in gathering and transmitting knowledge

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<sup>15</sup> Meeting with Native elders is special. To have the opportunity to re-listen to them on audio-tape is often healing. A listener can experience a feeling of having journeyed into the spirit world.

especially with Indigenous spirituality because spirit travels through sounds and words (Henderson 2006:138).

Indigenous knowledge is holistic, inductive, and rooted in the oral tradition. Thus, the use of the interview as a preferred research methodology is germane to the Indigenous oral transmission of knowledge through stories. Storytelling by Native elders often includes stories of the creation of the universe and the natural world we live in. Storylistening skills are developed from childhood through adulthood. Johnston (1999:46) tells us, “When that child sat before the storyteller to listen to stories, that child gave his spirit and his mind and himself to the story and the storyteller.” Learning about the sacredness of the sweat lodge ceremony from elders requires that we listen with all our senses (sight, smell, touch, sound, speech, and intuition)—paying attention to non-verbal cues such as facial and body gestures, gaps of silence, and sounds such as the mimicking of animals as in a bird’s chirp. As a listener, “it was for the child and each individual to seek the morsel of understanding and to draw his own inferences and start fashioning his being and his world” (Johnston 1999:46). The inductive process lies in the ability to tell stories and the skill in knowing how to listen. Stories shared were not directed at specific persons, but tell of situations where listeners can visualize themselves in that setting learning valuable lessons and teachings about the spirit world and our place in it.

As Barton (2004:519) explains “narrative inquiry is about the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors, and everyday experiences.” It is through creation stories told by elders that we learn about our relationship to the natural world of plants and animals, the sun and stars, the water and wind. The sweat lodge ceremony teaches us how to

communicate with the spirit world through prayer and ceremony and this process renews our ontological responsibilities to the Creator/Great Spirit and all of creation. In understanding the natural order of the Indigenous Cree three/four-tiered universe we learn about our place in the universe—as keepers and stewards of the land and all its sacred organisms. In narrative inquiry, stories are common among elders and lodge participants that experience the emotionality of the universe when spirits reveal themselves through animal sounds, flapping of eagle wings, blue lights and blue sparks from spirits. Thus, the analysis of qualitative data includes testimony of bearing witness to spiritual phenomenon within the lodge.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Audiotapes were transcribed and from this common themes are coded using open coding. “Open coding is the initial stage of constant comparative analysis, before delimiting the coding to a core category and its properties or selective coding” (Glaser 1992:38). Different markers are used to identify common themes into various categories. Answers to each of the research questions moved the pieces of data into comparative categories with sub-theoretical themes otherwise known as common threads. Pieces that did not sort themselves naturally provided new insights to the research problem in the form of serendipitous data, filling gaps in the literature or they may even turn out to be irrelevant to the study altogether. “The constant comparative process will soon, even quickly, lead to emergent categories and their properties and theoretical codes” ... “Categories emerge upon comparison and properties emerge upon more comparison” (Glaser 1992:39&43).

As the themes emerged, patterns led to a generalizable “theory” validated through the experience of elders.

In summary, gathering data through the interview method is best when working with subject matters that deal with the spirit world. Storytelling and storylistening are both skills attained through experience and a natural reciprocal relationship. In the next chapter, we take a closer look at the Native sweat lodge ceremony from a historical and contemporary perspective with an introduction to protocols and natural laws.

## Chapter Four: The Native Sweat Lodge Ceremony

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the history and description of a traditional sweat lodge ceremony. Included is a literature review on historical accounts of the sweat lodge, as well as contemporary views held by Native lodge holders on concerns regarding how the ceremony has transitioned over time. Protocols and natural laws are introduced here, but are discussed further in Chapter 5 on *The Principle of Spirit Piracy* and Chapter 6 on *Data Collection and Analysis*.

### 4.1 Sweat lodges

Lopatin (1960:977-993) clarifies terms used in ethnographic literature such as “sweat bath, steam bath, bath, sweat lodge, vapour bath, and sudatory.” He also compares a variety of European and Indigenous lodge structures and practices after which he states that, “the Greco-Roman bath and the Turkish bath are so different in many important respects from the Native American and the Sauna of north-western Europe that it is illogical to classify them together or to see in them a common origin” (Lopatin 1960:990). The mixed use of these terms in historical accounts of the Native sweat lodge has led to confusion and a misguided belief that somehow the Native sweat lodge has origins in European practices.

Jesuit missionaries began writing about the Native sweat lodge ceremony after their arrival to Canada in the 1600's. However, they wrote from an “outsider's” perspective comparing what they saw against Christian belief systems. Oftentimes, Native ceremonies were misrepresented particularly the use of drums, rattles, and rituals

that honoured the spirit and natural world. Even though the lodge is a place of prayer, many European observers considered this form of spiritual practice as worshipping the dark side of the spirit world. According to the Christian belief system, any practice that contacts spirits is against God. Therefore, the Christian belief system is completely different than that of the Native peoples. Unfortunately, misconceptions of the true meaning and purpose of the Native sweat lodge ceremonies continues today because they are compared to Christianity.

The construction of the sweat lodge is prescriptive: willow saplings are placed in the ground, bent-over toward the centre, and tied together to make a dome-shaped frame; the frame is covered with canvas or blankets leaving a “doorway” to the lodge—when the door is closed, it is completely dark inside; a hole is dug inside the lodge (generally in the centre); rocks are heated in an open fire; these hot rocks are brought into the lodge and placed in the pit; water is then splashed on the rocks to create steam. The sweat lodge is referred to as the “womb of Mother Earth.” It is a place of renewal—a place to purify the mind, body, and spirit—a place of healing. Four basic elements that make up the universe are required for this ceremony—earth, water, fire, and air. The culmination of these four elements along with prayers begins the process of the ceremony.

Elaborating on the structure of the lodge, we learn that willow saplings are used in the Canadian Plains; however the tree species used will depend on its availability in its geographical location. Historically, the frame was covered with a thick layer of animal hides, but today blankets are used instead. An entrance doorway to the lodge can face the east, south, or west depending on the protocols, teachings, and purpose of the lodge. Doorways refer to the cardinal directions of east, south, west, and north in which the



entrance to the sweat lodge faces—although I have never heard of a doorway facing the northern direction. Cole (2006:25) states that the dimensions of the lodge, number of rocks used, number of willows to build the lodge “if indeed it is (our relation)<sup>16</sup> the willow we speak of ... [will differ as] ... the [building material for the] framework [of the sweat lodge] is not identical from nation to nation to nation nor the rituals involved.” Rocks heated in the fire are also carefully selected for not all rocks can withstand extreme heat. Lava rocks are the best to use, as they are fire or igneous rocks. Sedimentary rocks located by or in water explode when heated. Intricate processes of constructing a sweat lodge are determined by how the lodge is transferred to a lodge keeper.

Ceremonies within the lodge are guided by protocols and led by experienced lodge leader(s) who have trained under the guidance of Native elder(s) for a minimum of 12-15 years. A fundamental protocol of Native sweat lodge ceremonies is humility and respect. Sweat lodge leaders must understand the responsibilities and consequences to improper use of sacred knowledge. Native elders caution, warn even, that there are consequences to “playing around with the sweat lodge ceremony and with spirits” (Tsuu T’ina elder 2007; Northern Lights Boy 2008). This caution is based in the knowledge that sweat lodges have positionality—this is to say that when spirits are called-in through prayer and song during the first round, the lodge becomes enlivened by spirits—it therefore takes on positionality where the lodge itself takes on a life of spirit. As the lodge is a conduit for spiritual communication between the physical and spiritual

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<sup>16</sup> When the Creator Spirit created the universe, a sacred energy was imbued in every aspect of the natural world (humans, plants and animals, rocks, clouds, water—everything shares in the same sacred life force energy—we are all interconnected. Therefore, willows are considered our relatives.

realms,<sup>17</sup> leaders must understand how to work with spirits of all levels according to the Indigenous Cree three-tiered universe.

Although this research focuses on the sweat lodge ceremony, interview participants also talked about the Sun Dance and the shaking tent; therefore, it is mentioned in this section to prepare readers for its mention in Chapter 6 on the *Data Collection and Analysis*. The traditional Native sweat lodge is one that a person approaches as a living entity—knowing that it has its own positionality, in a similar way that shaking tents<sup>18</sup> and Sun Dance ceremonies do. Bird (2005:89) reports that, “the mi-te-w<sup>19</sup> who has attained a high level of mi-te-wi-win can use the very powerful ‘shaking tent’ (koo-saa-pa-chi-kan) to access knowledge and power from the spirit beings.” The structure of the shaking tent is generally upright and smaller in diameter than a sweat lodge. It is a one-person lodge where the trained medicine person contacts spirits (Bird 2005:104-5; Young 1989:13; Bauer 1971:19-28).

Similarly, the Sun Dance or Thirst Dance ceremony (as known by the Cree) is a very powerful event that recognizes the “Spiritual Powers of the Universe” (Fine Day 1973:25-31). The focal point is the centre pole or the “tree of life” where spirits congregate as cloth and skin offerings are placed on the tree that joins the heavens and the earth. Both shaking tent and Sun Dance ceremonies are places where spiritual

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<sup>17</sup> It is understood that spiritual interaction continuously takes place between the physical and spiritual realms—they are arbitrarily separated for the sake of exploring the spiritual powers of the spirit level.

<sup>18</sup> Shaking tent ceremonies were commonly written about in historical literature as a way for the Eastern Cree to communicate with the spirit world (Bird 2005: 89). The sweat lodge among the Omushkego Cree of Hudson and James Bay area was used more as a purification process and/or medicinal purposes to warm a body from cold temperatures to prevent seizures (Louis Bird, 29 January 2008;pers. comm.).

<sup>19</sup> *Mi-te-wak* in the Omuhkego Cree language refers to their spiritual worldview of the shaman/medicine man (Bird 2005: 87-89).

communication with the universe is magnified. Thus, both ceremonies have distinct positionalities just as does the sweat lodge ceremony.

We know from the description of the Cree three-tiered universe discussed in the introductory chapter, that there are different levels of spirit (Mandelbaum 1979:302; Hultkrantz 1981:20-27). These levels of spirit are amplified as sweat lodges and become a living entity when ancestral and animal spirits are invoked from higher spirit realms to assist in the healing of participants. Spirits are called into the lodge from the four directions to begin the ceremony. The spirits of the grandmother and grandfather rocks, the water, willows, medicines and ceremonial items such as pipes, rattles, drums, and eagle fans are acknowledged first and called forth to assist in the healing ceremony. Within the lodge during a ceremony, it is as though a thin porous membrane exists between the physical/tangible and spirit/intangible worlds where communication is amplified between participants and the higher levels of spirit. The Native sweat lodge is then transformed into a spiritual paradigm where communication between all levels of spirit is open. There are different sweat lodge ceremonies used for a variety of purposes—purification sweats, bear sweats, or healing sweats. The number of willows used to make the structure often vary, as do songs, and the process of ceremonies. For instance, a “medicine” lodge will have 28 willows, as opposed to 14 willows; the number 14 representing the number of ribs on a buffalo. Whatever the purpose of the ceremony, the lodge remains a gateway to the spirit world that must be guided by experienced leaders.

Those who construct a lodge without proper training fail to observe traditional protocols. An interview with a non-Native participant believed that no harm would come

to those who are not powerful enough, or have limited knowledge, on how to call spirits in. However, Native interview respondents disagreed with this assessment, saying that this is precisely what creates havoc and allows “bad” spirits in. “Bad” spirits and the misuse of spiritual powers have the ability to cause harm to those inside the lodge or family members even at a distance (Northern Lights Boy 2008). Although the lodge is supposed to be a safe place, there is no question that “bad” spirits can enter through the opened doorways. Participants bring with them “bad” spirits attached to them. Thus, lodge leaders must pray for a good sweat (so that no one gets hurt) as the grandfather and grandmother rocks clean negative and toxic energies (Anonymous Tsuu T’ina elder: pers. comm., 27 October 2007).

Reasons for why and how the sweat lodge has transitioned over time focus mainly on its purpose, its size, the inclusion of women, and public inner cities lodges. Originally, the lodge was primarily used for purification and medicinal purposes. Lodges were small, holding up to four or six people. Women in the Cree tradition did not sweat, but do now, as do girls and boys of all ages and cultural backgrounds. Even though there are many sweat lodges in inner cities, there remains a difference in a feeling of deep cleansing when lodges are conducted in wilderness areas. Urban centres are heavily laden with toxins from various pollutants (vehicle, light, and noise)—this is said to create a thickening of chaos making it difficult for humans to connect with the natural world. Spirits can penetrate this chaos, but humans are often distracted and drained by the business of city noises.

In Meili’s closing comments she writes, “As the truck pulls away with Albert inside, I hop into my own car and return to a city that seems to know nothing of the

things that old man talks about” (Lightning 1991:87). Meili’s words strike a cord of sadness in a sober realization that cities are layered with various noises that create a thickening of inability to connect and hear spirits clearly. There is a particular unclean noisiness to cities that goes beyond audible sound—increased carbon emissions and air pollution, walking through technological microwaves and a faster pace of life that clutters the mind, body, and spirit. We become aware of how urban cities fragment the human from its spiritual self in the chaos of capitalism. Unfortunately, this same fragmentation has made its way into sacred spaces such as the Native sweat lodge.

#### **4.2 Brief literature review: The Native sweat lodge – historical and contemporary**

As the scope of this thesis is limited, there are three points I wish to emphasize: 1) historically, European scholars generally wrote from an “outsider’s” perspective that was informed by a colonial worldview; 2) after 500 years of colonization, Christianization, and residential school experiences, it is a bitter-sweet reality that Native peoples now search historical documents (along with seeking knowledge through the oral tradition from traditional elders) to reconstruct their cultural heritages; and 3) the effects of spiritual fragmentation through colonization continues today, as the spiritual relationship between human beings and the natural world is becoming unclear to many sweat lodgers. Although this thesis is set up as a binary juxtaposition between colonial and Indigenous worldviews, it is only to point out that the process of spiritual fragmentation has accelerated due to pressures placed on Indigenous peoples to abandon their traditional ways of knowing. On the other hand, Lightning (2008) argues that, “we cannot blame

everything on colonialism, we must teach our children about our Aboriginal tradition, culture, and ceremonies.”

While European scholars once wrote from the fringes of the sweat lodge ceremony as observers, today both non-Native and Native academics write from a perspective within the lodge as participant-observers. However, what is lacking is complete understanding of the spiritual complexities of the sweat lodge ceremony from Native elders who know. Jesuit priests and religious missionaries beginning in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century first wrote about historical accounts of the Native sweat lodge. Much later, anthropologists, ethnologists, historians, and folklorists wrote about them in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

A painting by Richards (c. 1804-1811) in Moose Factory, James Bay area is symbolic. The James Bay area was and still is home to the Cree people. The painting was done during the fur trade era. In the foreground is a White man with his Cree wife as they return from hunting partridges; while in the background are two standing sweat lodge frames. This image is symbolic for two reasons. First because it shows a layering of history—the fur trade over ancient First Nations spiritual practices. Secondly, the sweat lodge ceremony remains somewhat mysterious in that its spiritual powers are not well known, even 200 hundred years later. The frame of the sweat lodge looks like a skeleton in the background, yet the ceremony is very much alive today.

A few scholars from a long list who wrote on the sweat lodge between the 1600's and the 1950's include: Isham, J. (Cree in James Bay area) for the Hudson's Bay Society, Thwaites, R. G. editor of the *Jesuit Relations*, Mandelbaum, D. (Plains Cree), Skinner, A. (Eastern Cree, Saulteaux, Ojibway, and Menomini), Wissler, C. (Blackfoot), Hultkrantz,

A. (Shoshone and Cree), Bloomfield, L. (Menomoni and Plains Cree), Wallis, W. (Sarsi), Goddard, P. (Beaver Indians – Sarsi and Slavey), Lowie, R. (Assiniboine), Speck, F. (Montagnais-Naskapi and Penobscot), and Smith, J. (Western Woods Cree). A few scholars (from a long list of many) are mentioned to demonstrate the historical link of Cree sweat lodges often times found among documentation of other tribal groups and ceremonies.

As I searched for a story on how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people, my search took me on a journey of seventeen phone calls across Canada from Eastern Québec to Western Alberta speaking to Cree elders and one call to Joseph Bruchac in New York. It also took me on a journey through archival documents where I found evidence of Cree sweat lodges and lodges of other tribes. The greatest discovery I made was the strong link between the Cree and the *Musqua* (bear) spirit. The bear spirit is prayed to in Cree lodges today along with the use of bear grease and bear root medicine.

The sources mentioned above have links to the Cree people and their movement across Canada. Some scholars were included to demonstrate the variety of Native groups who have sweat lodge ceremonies as part of their cultural tradition. Reasons why other scholars were not included are simply that the list would be too long and too comprehensive of various tribes that practice sweat lodge ceremonies both in Canada and the United States. Also, it is out of respect to different tribal groups such as the Blackfoot Peoples to speak about their own traditions. The inclusion of scholars who wrote on tribes other than the Cree is to draw a comparison and parallel to transitions affecting spiritual ceremonies such as the sweat lodge today.

Many archival records on the Native sweat lodge ceremony are found in the *Jesuit Relations and Anthropological Papers of the American Museum of Natural History*—its content being both positive and negative. Derogatory terms such as “primitive,” “magic,” “sorcery,” “superstitious,” “conjuring,” “shamanism,” and “witchcraft” were often used to describe Native spiritual ceremonies (LaRocque 1988:200). It is what LaRocque calls and cautions against, “the dichotomy of civilization versus savagery” (LaRocque in Brown & Brightman 1988:199). A passage by Jouvency Joseph (1710) in *Jesuit Relations* on the use of the sweat lodge by Native peoples of New France to treat disease illustrates LaRocque’s point.

They believe that another source of disease is the hidden arts and the charms of sorcerers, which they seek to avert by means of absurd ceremonies. Often they expel noxious humors by sweating. They inclose a certain portion of the hut with pieces of bark and cover it with hides, in order that no air may enter. Within they pile stones heated to a high temperature. They enter naked and toss their arms while singing. But, strange to say, they will leave this heat, dripping with perspiration, and in the very coldest part of winter cast themselves into a lake or river, careless of pleurisy. (Joseph 1710:260).

While Joseph’s observations maybe accurate in his perception, he clearly did not fully understand the context of the ceremony from the Indian perspective. What is clear, is that Joseph as a member of the Society of Jesus recorded what he saw from a colonial perspective—seeing what he deemed as the savages of New France taking part in sorcery.

In a bizarre twist, many Native peoples today are reconstructing their fragmented cultural heritages through searches of anthropological, ethnographic, and historical documents—this is a bittersweet discovery. Bitter, in that historical documents serve as a reminder of damage done to Native peoples by colonial settlers. Sweet, in that



anthropologists, ethnographers, historians, and religious writers provided pieces of cultural evidence that are validated in the oral tradition—in some cases, it may only be a shred of evidence available today. Such is the case with a story of how the sweat lodge came to, or was given to, the Cree peoples. Although it is extremely difficult to find in both the oral tradition and written texts, a story appeared in Specks (1925:17-18) and Bruchac (1993:67-69) in the Montagnais-Naskapi (Cree) story of *Me'jo and the Bear*. Another theory is put forth by Waugh (1996:55) as recorded from Roger Vandersteene who said, “Like pipes, sweat lodges probably originally came about among the Cree as a result of dreams.” Spiritual knowledge among the Cree as with numerous other Indigenous peoples is brought about through dreams. In the end, it is unclear how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people.

My reason for pursuing this matter is in wondering whether cultural knowledge is entirely lost through the process of colonization or not. Even though many spiritual messages are received through dreams among the Cree, it remains possible that historical evidence of this story can be located in written or oral text. The problem with missing information is that it is difficult to reconstruct tribal history in contemporary times—it is as though DNA sequence of Native history has been lost—it is a type of Spirit Piracy and cultural genocide in that the spirit of stories is missing.

Included in a very short list of many Native and non-Native contemporary scholars who have written on the sweat lodge since the 1950's are: Bruchac, J. (Abenaki), Bucko, R. (Sioux style lodges), Henderson, J. Y. (Cree), Auger, D. (Sakaw Cree), Bird, L. (Omushkego Cree), Clay, C. (Swampy Cree), Harrod (Blackfoot & Plains Indians), Waugh, E. (Cree), and Hogan, L. (Chickasaw). The overall sense of why the sweat lodge

has transitioned from personal to public and from traditional to modern are due mostly impart to social changes and government policies that intervened in Aboriginal ways of life.

Colonial fragmentation of Native sweat lodges began with historical writers that wrote from a colonial perspective that demonized these ceremonies. Hence, the Christianization of Native people was followed by Government bans on spiritual ceremonies and forced attendance in residential schools that adversely affected the transmission of cultural and spiritual knowledge. The 1970's saw a change in how the sweat lodge was interpreted as residential school survivors began to reconstruct cultural traditions oftentimes without proper knowledge of these ceremonies. This was followed by a rapid interest by New Agers who exploited Native spirituality for profit. The frustration by Native peoples is evident in the words of Smith (2004):

Another battle being waged by Native people deals with the industry propelled by the New Age movement, which appropriates, distorts, and sells Native spirituality without respect or permission...It would appear such practitioners feel they have an inherent right to use whatever aspects of Native spirituality they feel disposed to use. It has been suggested such a sense of entitlement to everything Native stems from the initial sense of discovery the first European felt. This entitlement assumes the right to take what is indigenous, with complete disregard for Native peoples, in a manner in which the perpetrators would not think of doing easily with other traditions. (Smith 2004:128).

Thunderbird (1992:187) also states that, "They came for our land, for what grew or could be grown on it, for the resources in it, and for our clean air and pure water ... And now, after all that, they've come for the very last of our possessions; now they want our pride, our history, our spiritual traditions."

Since the New Age Movement 1980's many non-Natives have written on the Native sweat lodge and commercialized this sacred ceremony while failing to comprehend First Nations histories, the meaning of creation stories, and the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights. An Internet search on the Native sweat lodge generates many hits in the twenty-first century. Yet, the sweat lodge ceremony as Lightning (2008) explained "is experiential and this is why we don't put too many details in writing because people have to come into the lodge to experience the ceremony for themselves." Another concern among traditionalists is the copying of various parts of ceremonies and creating new ones that leads to cultural confusion and misappropriation of sacred knowledge.

In summary, the sweat lodge ceremony has significantly transitioned over time since it was first written about in the mid-1600 to the present. Once European scholars and religious leaders wrote from an "outsider's" perspective to where they are now "participant-observers" in the lodge. Historically, the sweat lodge was used privately among families for the purpose of healing and purification. Today, sweat lodges are large and used communally for the purpose of healing, purification, and communicating with the spirit world. Bird (*Omuskego Cree*) stated that in the past, "Our Cree people used the sweatlodge but, to my understanding, they didn't see it as a spiritual thing - they use it for purely medical purposes" (Bird 2007:101). As there is no separation between the physical and spirit, Bird's statement appears somewhat confusing in that the sweat lodge is a spiritual process to many tribal groups. We reconcile Bird's comment by acknowledging that sweat lodges were used to remedy the human body (a spiritual form) from illness as it is done in all sweat lodges. It is possible that since the spirit and

physical worlds are considered one, to separate it as a “spiritual thing” is unnecessary, as the physical body is spiritual. The shaking tent as Bird mentioned earlier was used to contact spirits. To the Cree people who live in other parts of Canada, the sweat lodge was used for purification purposes and today it is used for communicating with ancestral spirits and healing as well.

Today people of all ages, gender, and cultural background participate in the ceremony. Sweat lodges are conducted in inner cities, not only in the wilderness. The lodge ceremony also is used to communicate with the spirit world. The spiritual complexity of the sweat lodge ceremony however remains a mystery today. It is as though the impact of colonialism and Christian beliefs has caused the spiritual intensity of these ancient ceremonies to recede to into the background; like the sweat lodge frames in the background of Richards’ painting (c. 1802-1811).

The point I wish to make in this chapter is that colonialism has a spirit—and the “spirit of colonialism” once outside the lodge in the 1600’s has made its way inside the lodge in the twenty-first century. Just as human beings have internalized colonization, the sweat lodge is now experiencing the same. Many participants are unaware that they live their lives through colonial assumptions and ideologies, even in Native ceremonies. Colonial paradigms work in direct opposition to ancient protocols of the sweat lodge. Thus, to fully realize the spiritual complexities of this ancient ceremony, it must be done according to Indigenous cosmologies. Although Native and non-Native alike take part in sweat lodge ceremonies today, what is often observed is a continued lack of understanding about protocols and how these are based in natural laws. This knowledge

is acquired over many years from experienced Native elders who have worked with the spirit world in ceremonies.

The most difficult aspect of grappling with the knowledge of spiritual powers of the sweat lodge and the protocols around them is the varied nuances between and within same tribal groups. As there are no written rules, contradictions appear to be part of the protocols. Yet, when a person participates in lodges (to possibly leading the ceremony), it is then that a person experiences why setting concrete rules would limit spirit as humans cannot decide how or when a spiritual event will take place. The powers of the universe are a great mystery, which is in part why we give ourselves over to the Creator Spirit. Humans are, after all, at the lower level as described in the Indigenous Cree three-tiered (sometimes four-tiered) universe belief system. Thus, allowing for mystery frees a participant to see, feel, and experience the spiritual powers of the universe. Protocols of conducting a ceremony and how to work with the spirit world are learned experientially and from elders who seek to serve the Creator Spirit. As Wilson (2008:99) quotes Tafoya's (1995) *Principle of Uncertainty*: "It is not possible to know both the context and definition of an idea at the same time. The closer you get to defining or explaining an idea, the more it loses its context." The same principle can be applied to the spirit world. The more a person tries to pin spirit in place with written laws, the more it will move because spirit is ephemeral. Protocols that guide ceremonies follow a basic rule; to pray to the spirit that lives within all forms *first*.

A major difference between Christian and Native belief systems is that the Native system is not written, as it is in the Christian Bible. Native elders do not wish to have these protocols written down because people will copy them—the sweat lodge ceremony

is learned through experience. This will become clearer in the following chapters.

Granted, the question of authority is highly debated especially as more people learn about the sweat lodge ceremony and claim to be experts. As a Tsuu T'ina elder told me, "Do not put any elder on a pedestal, they are only human. Remember that you can communicate with the Creator yourself. Pray and speak from you heart. Trust your intuition. If someone makes you feel uneasy, then there is a reason for this. Find another person to guide you" (Anonymous Tsuu T'ina elder: pers. comm., 27 October 2007).

The next chapter delves into the *Principle of Spirit Piracy* to illustrate how it is observed in the sweat lodge. Four stories told of my personal experiences in different sweat lodges are used to demonstrate how Spirit Piracy works. Natural laws are also discussed further in chapters 5, 6, and 7.

## Chapter Five: The Principle of Spirit Piracy

### Introduction

In this chapter, I provide the principle and definition of Spirit Piracy, plus four stories of actual sweat lodge ceremonies. These stories are from my personal experience in lodges and are used to demonstrate how Spirit Piracy works, consequences to violating natural laws, and why it is imperative to revere and protect sacred ceremonies.<sup>20</sup> Although invisible, spirit is alive and has the ability to show itself in ways humans can relate to. This is illustrated in the fourth story when spirits revealed themselves in the form of “blue sparks and blue rocks.” Bearing witness to the emotionality of the universe and to such magnificence is the reason why arresting Spirit Piracy is crucial. Our spirits need to be nurtured and to receive healing from this spiritual source of sacred energy. On a spiritual level, our spirits are old<sup>21</sup> and understand the communication that takes place with the greater source of spiritual energy with the universe, even though our physical minds may not. To harm this sacred energy is to wound the sacred that lives in all of us.

The principle of Spirit Piracy is actually quite simple; it is to cause harm to the sacred by way of pirating the spirit that lives within all creation. As the Creator/Great Spirit created everything, the same life force energy or “blood” energy was imbued in every part of the natural world. It is placed in human beings, trees, plants and animals,

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<sup>20</sup> The purpose of including these personal stories is to demonstrate first-hand by contextualizing what I mean by Spirit Piracy. Elders involved in this research have given me permission to include these stories.

<sup>21</sup> Human beings have been walking the earth estimated at 40,000 years ago. There is a belief among many people that the human spirit is recycled into new human bodies, which gives reason for the saying that a person has an “old soul.” A person with an old soul is considered wise, but also having lived other lifetimes. So an old soul/spirit will recognize the spirit of land, animals, and other old-spirited people through a feeling and possibly memories and flashbacks that they would not otherwise have knowledge of. This was a common belief among the African Traditional Spiritualists I interviewed in Dzelukope, Ghana, West Africa in June 2006. This was part of a course requirement for a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Development Studies through the University of Calgary, Credit Travel Study Program.

water, land and rocks, sun and moonshine, wind, clouds, mountains and rain— everything! Hence the phrase “all my relations” bears testimony to the fact that we are all interconnected by this sacred energy. Thus, when harm is caused to any part of the natural world, it is felt throughout the entire universe, whether people realize it or not. When the spirit of plants, people, or things is negated, misappropriated, or wounded in any way it harms the embodied spirit of that organism. This is why I call this ‘spirit’ piracy and not ‘spiritual’ piracy even though it is of a spiritual nature—it is harm caused to individual spirits (embodied spirits) that I am referring to. The word ‘piracy’ is used in the sense of misusing spiritual energy; it is not used in reference to pirates that hijack foreign ships. The combination of the words spirit and piracy together form the phrase Spirit Piracy, which refers to the misuse of spiritual energy from various forms. The forms I refer to are “embodied spirits” as defined in Henderson (2006:136-144).

The principle of Spirit Piracy is about a displacement of spiritual energy that benefits the individual doing the inappropriate behaviour. For example, if a person is sexually violated, the person doing the violation is taking/stealing the victim’s energy.

Similarly, taking plants without acknowledging their spirit first and making an offering of tobacco to the plant’s spirit is an infraction because the spirit of the plant is negated, thus the human asserts his or her will over that of the plant. The offering of tobacco to a plant before it is picked is an Indigenous protocol. The tobacco spirit communicates with the spirit of the plant that is to be dislodged from the earth. How the violation of protocol impacts the spirit of a plant, for instance, is that the energy of the plant and its neighbouring plants is disrupted. Plants share oxygen with other plants, just as their roots can also be touching each other. Ripping a plant from the earth affects



other plants, the soil, and the energy between the person picking the plant and the plant. A violation of protocol is a disruption of spiritual energy/embodied spirits within individual forms. This violation is experienced in numerous ways and to varying degrees. In the end, Spirit Piracy negatively affects everyone and everything, as we all draw from the same energy source of life that replenishes the spiritual self.

The spectrum of Spirit Piracy is broad. Murder and cultural genocide would be the worst alongside of poisoning animals and their destroying their habitats. Spirit Piracy can include a nasty remark to another person that damages that person's spirit if internalized. Spirit Piracy occurs in the shifting of the spiritual energy within an embodied spirit that negatively affects the entire universe whether this is consciously realized by the rest of the natural world or not.

It is my hope that readers will recognize the act of Spirit Piracy as something that can be changed to where society focuses on experiencing the majesty of spirit. This can happen through continued awareness of the greater spiritual force that exists in people, the wind, and baby fawns—we are part of the natural world that is part of a larger spiritual force.

Why Spirit Piracy occurs is that the natural order of the universe as set by the Creator/Great Spirit has been inverted. Using the Cree three-tiered universe and spiritual belief system we find: the lower level belonging to the physical realm where human beings and all sacred organisms reside; the middle level is home to ancestral spirits; and the highest level is that of animal spirits and the Creator spirit (Mandelbaum 1979:302). While all levels interact with each other simultaneously, they do not change order, as the three-tiered universe is a natural order (similar to how the chemical compound of H<sub>2</sub>O for

water is fixed—it is a natural order—this is a natural law). Therefore, humans remain on the lower level, never to be equal to or above the Creator/Great Spirit.

Through religious misinterpretation, western science, and colonization this natural order was inverted to where the sacred was placed second to human wills and desires—such is the source and process of spiritual fragmentation. Spiritual fragmentation is a form of Spirit Piracy that serves to move the human spirit away from the greater spirituality of the universe. Humans rationalize their superiority over the natural world forgetting that they were created last and that we can continue to learn from ancient beings such as rocks, land, and the stars.

To conclude, Spirit Piracy is defined as the human violation of natural laws—it is the pirating of spirit from people, places, and things. Humans have learned over time to manipulate nature, control each other, and pillage and plunder Mother Earth to satisfy selfish wills and desires. Humans have placed themselves equal to or above the Creator/Great Spirit thereby inverting the natural order of creation.

### **5.1 Four stories that illustrate Spirit Piracy and the powers of the spirit world**

The four stories presented in this chapter are central to the thesis in that they identify the problematic social phenomenon I refer to as Spirit Piracy. Although elders teach that what happens in the lodge, stays in the lodge—there are exceptions. These exceptions are not to disrespect an admonishment, but rather in this case, to expose and bring healing to a wound. As noted by Blackfoot Elder Casey Eagle Speaker, “in order to heal a wound, we must be willing to look at it” (Casey Eagle Speaker, Blackfoot elder: pers. comm., 18 October 2006).

The stories told in this chapter are set in the context of actual sweat lodge ceremonies meant to look at the wound of Spirit Piracy. Not only do they animate the problem, but also demonstrate why human beings must protect what is sacred. Sweat lodges are meant to be a safe place, as the lodge represents the womb of Mother Earth— anonymity allows participants to express their deepest feelings in an effort to heal. However, wrongdoings within lodges must be exposed. To remain silent is to be stuck in victimization. I was encouraged by and received permission from the elders named in stories three and four to talk about the consequences of violating natural laws and conversely, the benefits of adhering to protocols.

These stories demonstrate how following protocols of natural laws creates a pathway for human beings to communicate with the spirit world. Each of the four stories varies in length. Italics are used in stories when elders give their explanation as to what transpired during dramatically different lodge ceremonies. I provide interpretations from elders and that of my own at the end of each story to explain how infractions to ceremonial processes results in Spirit Piracy.

The stories provide examples on how Spirit Piracy is committed when humans violate protocols in and around Native sweat lodges. The first story relates to the violation of protocols around personal property—a protocol that I experienced and one that demonstrates the importance of respecting each other's personal items that are brought to sweat lodge ceremonies. The second story is very short, but unpacking its significance is long, as the explanation demonstrates a violation of protocols during the pouring of water on the rocks. The third story describes consequences to inappropriate behaviours that violate natural laws, which anger the spirits. According to Native elders,

although spirits are superior to humans, they are known to fight among themselves. Story three describes how violation of protocols and natural laws resulted in consequences where spirits fought at the spirit level. This story is told to demonstrate the dangers of Spirit Piracy and why it is imperative to address this problematic social phenomenon. The fourth story juxtaposes the first three stories in that it describes how human beings can bear witness to the emotionality (or emotional energy) of the universe/the natural world/the spirit world in the form that human beings can understand. Story four addresses what can happen when protocols and natural laws are adhered to, which in this case, the sacred revealed itself in the form of blue sparks and blue rocks. This last story gives reason as to why protecting the sacredness of the sweat lodge ceremony is about protecting a natural resource—the sacred relationship of spiritual communication between the natural world, the spirit world, and the Creator.

All four stories are central to the thesis because they identify a problem in and around an ancient ceremony that indicates protocols and natural laws are not well understood. These stories also are a source of spiritual renewal, strength, and knowledge that teaches us how to become better human beings. The wonderment of bearing witness to spirits in the form of “blue sparks and blue rocks” is the equivalent to experiencing a spiritual awakening where the power of the sacred is forever undeniable and life changing.

## **Violation of Protocols and Natural Laws**

### **Story 1: Personal property as personal medicine**

One Sunday, I arrived at the sweat lodge to attend a ceremony. There was a group of approximately twelve people, a mixture of men and women. During the first break, after the first round, I remained inside the lodge while others went out to cool off. The blanket I had left outside with my shoes was given to someone else without my knowledge or permission. When I came to use it during the next break, it was missing. I asked where my blanket was. I was told that it had been given to someone else. This is when I became conscious that a protocol had been violated.

As I am very sensitive to energy, I was disturbed by the negative energy I felt on my blanket when it was returned to me. I realized that what we bring to the lodge is very personal—it carries our own personal energy/medicine.<sup>22</sup> The effects of taking my blanket and returning it to me with negative energy made me feel personally and spiritually violated. I felt that my spirit and personal space had been pirated; hence, the term “Spirit Piracy.”

When I re-entered the lodge at the beginning of the third round, I talked about what had happened. I told everyone that what we bring to the lodge is our personal medicine and no one should help themselves to another’s personal items without first asking permission to do so. Just as no one ought to help them self to an eagle fan, a rattle, or medicine from an elder’s or medicine person’s bag, no one ought to take another

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<sup>22</sup> The word “medicine” is used in the sense of personal “energy.” Peat (1994:128) argues that, “the problem [with the word ‘medicine’] is that this is an English word, an attempt at translation, and not a word in the Native language.... *Medicine* is an attempt to convey within a single word a whole spectrum of concepts that belong to a profoundly different vision of reality and the human body.”

person's things. Personal ceremonial items act as a form of medicine to individuals—all personal items carry personal energy. Everyone listened attentively. One person asked me where I had received that teaching. That teaching came from me and from my lifetime of learning to respect other people's property and about protocol around sacred ceremonies and various items. The teaching is simple—respect.

### **Story 2: Grandfather and grandmother rocks**

The second story is very short, but the lessons are deep and central to understanding protocols, natural laws, and respect. This story takes place inside the sweat lodge during a ceremony. The term “pouring” or “splashing” water on the rocks describes the action of putting water on the hot rocks (rocks that have been heated in a fire outside the lodge) during a sweat lodge ceremony. This is done with a ladle, a bison horn, or a bunch of long sage branches (with leaves) tied together. Whatever the instrument, its significance will relate to the lodge and how the ceremony was passed to the lodge holder. A bison horn for example relates to the land of the Plains as it is home to the bison.

There are four rounds to a sweat lodge ceremony that coincide with the four cardinal directions (east, south, west, and north). Between each round, the door of the sweat lodge is opened to cool the inside. Participants are often invited to go outside to take a break and cool down as well. Details of the individual rounds will be discussed in chapter 6. In brief, “a round” can last anywhere from two minutes to an hour. The length of time is dependent on the number of people in the lodge, the intensity of the heat, and how long the person leading the round chooses to make it. Overall, the spirits have a large part in what transpires during the ceremony. A sweat lodge is not governed by

man-made time. As Soft White Cloud Woman says, “there’s no clock in there, we are in the spirit world” (Soft White Cloud Woman 2007).

Story two: I was asked to pour the third round, the healing round. All of a sudden, someone threw bear root medicine on the grandmother and grandfather rocks without asking permission to do so. This concludes the story.

Throwing any kind of medicine (herb) on the grandmother and grandfather rocks without permission is problematic for several reasons. When a person has the pail of water and is leading the round, that person acts as an intermediary placed in direct communication between the physical and spirit levels—this communication flows vertically from the rocks and up through the top of the lodge to the Creator.

As the sweat lodge has a positionality of its own, the spirits that are called into the ceremony can be offended by inappropriate behaviours. The person pouring water is in direct communication with the spirit world and the spirit of the water—interfering with this sacred relationship can result in chaos at the spirit level or it can chase away the “good” spirits that were called into the ceremony to help with healing (Anonymous Tzu Tina elder, 2007). Throwing medicine on the rocks without seeking permission from the pourer is an act that pirates the spirit of the communication between the pourer and the spirit world, the spirit of the rocks, the medicines, the water, and the lodge. Remember that the sweat lodge has a positional of its own, as the spirits called into the lodge enliven it. Tinker (2004:105) tells us that rocks are ancient beings that have a consciousness and possess an ability to speak and to listen. When medicine is thrown on the rocks, there must be intent demonstrated by a prayer attached to that action. Nothing is done during a

ceremony without clearly stated intentions, which this applies to singing songs, prayers, and the use of medicines on the rocks (Manitopyes 2008).

The water pourer bears greater responsibility as a leader, thus must have an awareness of the health of all participants, know whether there are first-timers present, and must not make a lodge overly hot when children are participating. Likewise, all participants must be vigilant, aware, and take responsibility for their own behaviours. Those who violate protocol must question their motives as often time inappropriate behaviours are self-centred and ego driven. This reinforces the ancient process of spiritual fragmentation; that which places human beings in direct violation of the sacred due to the fact that a person forgets the natural order of creation. We are to remain humble to the greater spiritual force of the natural world.

Proper protocol is about respect and allowing spiritual communication to flow freely between the pourer and the spirit world, without interference. Although a person's intentions may be well meaning; there is a pattern to follow. Just as there is a process to a Catholic mass, there also is a process to the sweat lodge ceremony. This process creates a pathway to the spirit world. Inappropriately throwing medicine on the rocks demonstrates that protocols are not well understood.

Natural laws follow the natural order of the cosmos that works in symphony with the Indigenous Cree three-tiered universe described in the introductory chapter. When human egos take charge this creates a reversal of the natural order of the cosmos because a person is then placing him or herself above or equal to higher spirit levels. This in effect pirates the spirit of the sweat lodge and all that are in it—the self, others, the positionality of the lodge, the rocks, water, medicine, and the rest of the natural world.



## **Consequences to Violating Protocols and Natural Laws**

### **Story 3: “Good and bad spirits”**

The third story focuses on the consequences when violating protocols and natural laws. Two elders present at this sweat lodge ceremony are also included in the research interviews in chapter 5. The elders offer their explanation of what happened during the ceremony, which involves talk about “good” and “bad” spirits. According to Northern Lights Boy (2008) the influence of modernity in traditional ceremonies is in part responsible for conflicts in Native spirituality because mixed religious teachings brought into the lodge creates spiritual confusion among the participants and affects the spirits.

The topic of conflict between spirits at the spirit level is a point of contention even among Aboriginal peoples that have different belief systems. For example, the Naskapi believe in reincarnation, while the Plains believe in ancestral spirits that live in the spirit world. How would the Naskapi and Plains people react in a shared sweat lodge? The answer would depend on the attributes of the person. If a person is mean, then that person’s spirit will also be mean. Thus, how a person approaches a sweat lodge and interacts with the spirits of another person will contribute to how “reincarnated spirits” and “ancestral spirits” will interact with one another. When a person arrives at the lodge with openness and kindness in their hearts, the spirits will get along. Spirits may even recognize each other and be happy to spend time together. It is when people arrive with agendas and plans to take over the ceremony that a problem arises. In an interview with Northern Lights Boy (2008), he stated that, “it is the duty of spirits to protect the body they are attached to.”

This story describes a sweat lodge ceremony I attended in the winter of 2008 where inappropriate behaviours by participants created chaos on both the spirit and physical levels. Spirits that arrived with various participants clashed with the regular spirits of the lodge. In this story, we learn how benevolent and malevolent spirits clashed as a result of human violation of natural laws.

In attendance were: three Native elders (two of which were medicine people), two young non-Native women, a middle aged non-Native woman, two middle aged non-Native men, and me. The two young non-Native women professed to be experts in Native spiritual ceremonies; one was a student of New Age teachings, while the other had attended several potlatch ceremonies on the West Coast of Canada. Although each of the two young women professed expertise, neither had ever attended a sweat lodge ceremony before that day. While we waited for the rocks to be readied, the “New Age” woman was burned on the leg by a flying piece of hot coal while tending to the fire.<sup>23</sup>

From the onset of this sweat lodge ceremony I felt a tension inside the lodge. My stomach was in knots. I sensed that there was a problem right away, I felt alarmed and nervous. I held my breath a few times and thought, “Wow what’s going on here?”

Once we were all seated in the lodge, the same young woman who was burned put her hands up and started to “mime for spirits” around the rocks. She threw herbs onto the rocks without permission. When she placed a small bag in front of her, the elder leading the lodge told her not to remove any of the contents from the bag. I was surprised that he did not ask her to remove the bag from the lodge entirely.

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<sup>23</sup> On the next page, Northern Lights Boy does state that this woman’s burn was treated with bear medicine.

Within fifteen minutes of the commencement of the first round (after the door was closed), I sensed the presence of unhappy spirits. My stomach began to tense. I felt very nervous and knew that there was something seriously wrong. Sitting beside the elder who was leading the lodge, I heard scratching outside on the canvas at shoulder height between us—there was no one outside the lodge. Suddenly, the willow frame started to violently shake. I heard one of the medicine men moan and the other pray with great intensity. When the door was opened, the New Age woman mentioned that she felt the strong presence of spirits, but did not specify if they were good or bad. She mentioned nothing about the violent shaking of the lodge, or the scratching on the canvas. The other young woman seemed completely unaware of any abnormalities (even though she claimed to be experienced in Native ceremonies). The other participants also fairly new to sweat lodge ceremonies, made no mention of the spiritual tensions within the lodge.

During the break between the first and second round, this woman splashed water from her water bottle with great force onto the rocks. Her actions were extremely disrespectful to the lodge, the rocks, the elders, and the other participants. In the process of our conversation, she told us that she had studied Native spirituality from a New Age perspective.

Once we re-entered the lodge for the second round and the door was closed, the tension at the spirit level intensified but dulled during the third and fourth rounds. The medicine men were forced to pray feverishly to calm the spirits.

Two days after this sweat lodge ceremony, the elder leading the lodge telephoned me to ask how I was doing. He said, “This is exactly what you are talking about in your research. What happened in that lodge was Spirit Piracy between the participants and

between the spirits at the spirit level. The scratching you heard was caused by angry spirits” (Anonymous Tsuu T’ina elder: pers. comm., 11 March 2008).

Also in attendance was Northern Lights Boy; this is what he had to say about what transpired between the spirits in that particular sweat lodge (Northern Lights Boy 2008):

*This one lady that came in—the first time I seen her she was sitting outside. I introduced myself. When I shook her hand, I knew there was something wrong. I told her that in the sweat lodge. I asked her, “What’s bugging you?” She didn’t answer. She looked at me and apparently when she was taking care of that fire, it burned her pants, but she didn’t feel it. Then the lodge keeper gave her bear grease to put on the burn. After a while I told her (the New Age woman) “it’s your mind, your ego, that’s what caused that because you wanted to experience how to be Native. That’s the reason why that (the burn) happened to you. That grandfather rock tested you. So when the time came and that sweat lodge was there, you came out of it, your whole vision of life changed.”*

I expressed my concern to Northern Lights Boy and told him how I interpreted the incident and how it made me feel. When she was “miming for spirits” inside the lodge, it struck me that she was very spiritually confused as a result of so many different teachings coming together possibly at a superficial level. All the different teachings had created confusion, as they had only scraped the surface of otherwise deep religious teachings and practices. Having knowledge of many teachings is good, but to forge them together as though they are simplistic creates problems.

From my perspective, what had come into the lodge with this young woman were various spirits from the teachings of numerous sources. Although she claimed to be an expert in Aboriginal spirituality, she had not experienced a sweat lodge. She brought with her a bag of assorted goods, demonstrated disrespectful behaviour, and disrespected the lodge. It seemed to me that the elder and the two other medicine people had to work

harder to bring spiritual balance. It seemed that there was conflict at a higher level between the spirits themselves. The spirits that are generally in that lodge did not recognize those that came with this New Age woman and this created conflict at the level of spirits.

I continued by observing that there were two levels of tension: at the spirit level and tension on the physical level as we experienced the effects—the scratching on the outside of the tarp and the shaking of the willows. I knew that the lodge keeper could hear this and that he had deliberately asked me to sit beside him as this protected him. Northern Lights Boy (2008) responded by saying this:

*The spirits were fighting. Let me explain this. The spirits that came in that time were trying to control the spirits of others that came in. That's the reason why you encountered the lodge shaking, the scratching, they were trying to contain you so the spirits would be still. Spirits fight. Spirits kill. Spirits can control people. Spirits tie up people with love medicine. All that. When you go to a sweat lodge, there are things you have to be careful of. You have to watch yourself—the most important parts of your body are your face, back, and neck—that's where your life is at—if anyone blows medicine on your neck, they'll control you.*

What Northern Lights Boy shared with us is not common knowledge. He is well versed and experienced in working with benevolent and malevolent spirits. Reference to this knowledge is written about in historical anthropological literature where shamans use bad medicine to place intrusive objects in other people through use of spiritual powers (Mandelbaum 1979:163-165). It remains to be proven from a Western scientific perspective, but is taken very seriously by those who know the powers of the spirit world particularly in Native communities.

When bad medicine is placed on someone, this is to pirate the spirit of another. There are consequences to Spirit Piracy of which those who practice this form of

medicine are generally aware. Misappropriation of the sacred within the lodge is particularly disturbing as it plays with the spirits of the spirit world, which in turn is felt by participants within the lodge.

What took place in the lodge was Spirit Piracy, mostly brought on by the spiritual confusion around the New Age woman. As New Age teachings are a conglomerate of various teachings from Wicca, Native spirituality, Buddhism and other religions, they carry with them spirits of their own. In this situation, the spirits brought into the lodge by the young woman clashed with the spirits that are generally called in by the leader of this lodge. The erratic behaviours from the New Age woman also created tensions between the spirits at the spirit level this was felt by the some of the participants within the lodge. Aside from the elders and medicine men, the other participants made no mention of the spiritual chaos. Spirits generally decide who they will allow to hear them. Therefore, it is equally possible for some people to hear the spirits within the lodge, while other participants do not.

The spirits around the fire recognized that something was out of place and thus burned the New Age woman with a piece of hot coal even before she entered the lodge. Northern Lights Boy explained that, "She was tested by the ancestors." When this woman threw herbs and water on the grandmother and grandfather rocks without permission, she violated protocol and natural laws. Protocol and natural laws require that we honour the spirit of the rocks, the medicine, and the water because they are living beings. The medicine men worked hard to restore spiritual balance within the lodge. What took place in that lodge is a prime example of the consequences to human violation

of natural laws—spirits rebel and participants suffer the effect of negative human behaviours.

### **Bearing Witness to the Sacred**

#### **Story 4: “Blue rocks”**

The fourth story is about spiritual revelation within the sweat lodge. When protocols are followed, a pathway to the sacred is created. This is when the emotionality (or the emotional energy) of the natural world reveals itself. In this story spirits appear in the form of “blue rocks.” This story is critical to the thesis because it illustrates why we must protect the traditional Native sweat lodge as a source of spiritual healing, a sacred place, and a natural resource where human beings bear witness to the emotionality of the universe and see that the sacred does exist.

On February 6, 2008, I attended a night sweat where there were just two people present, a medicine man<sup>24</sup> and myself. Unknowingly at that time, this sweat lodge ceremony turned out to be the answer of a tobacco offering I had made to this medicine person two weeks prior—I had offered tobacco to understand the meaning of a profound dream. I dreamed that I was standing two feet outside and away from a sweat lodge facing a very large doorway in the southwest. In the dream, I felt the presence of a powerful spiritual being who was calling me inside the lodge. I knew intuitively that this

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<sup>24</sup> The use of the term medicine man or medicine woman is contentious. Many gifted people who work with medicines feel uncomfortable with being called a medicine man/woman. In an interview with Nakota elder Northern Lights Boy, he says that when people call him a medicine man, the spirits challenge him.

dream was quite significant. In this description of “blue rocks” I only speak about my experiences and not that of the medicine person’s.

As I helped prepare the fire outside, bringing wood and rocks, we offered tobacco to the fire and prayed for a good sweat. I also prayed to be shown the meaning of my dream. Once the rocks were heated, I was asked to go into the lodge and get ready to welcome the grandmother and grandfather rocks with smudge. As the medicine person strategically placed twelve brightly glowing orange rocks inside the pit, I sprinkled sage on each of them, welcoming and acknowledging their spirits. I had already prayed to the sage asking its spirit to come forth and help us during the ceremony.

Once the medicine person was seated in the back of the lodge, I was asked to close the door. I took my place on the woman’s side, to the left of the doorway, which in this lodge is the south-western direction—this coincided with my dream. The medicine man asked me to pour the first and third rounds, while he would do the second and fourth rounds (I will speak only of what transpired in the first and third rounds). The first round is the welcome round, the second the sharing round, the third the healing round, and the fourth the thank you or closing round. The healing round in Cree sweat lodges (in Western Canada) is often done by a woman, but this varies from lodge to lodge even between Cree traditions. How rounds are conducted depends on how the ceremony was transferred to the lodge holder.

As I began the first round, I said my spirit name out loud and after praying to the spirit of the water I splashed twelve times, one splash for each of the rock beings that came into the lodge and four splashes for the four directions, and three more times for the above world, the below world, and mother earth. Within moments of calling in the spirits



from the eastern doorway, the southern doorway, the western doorway, and the northern doorway, we started seeing blue sparks on the ground. I sang a Cree song to call in the spirits. As I continued to splash and pray, we felt the presence of many spirits enter the lodge. We saw a faint blue colour in some of the rocks. I completed the first round singing four songs and praying for close to half an hour. After using up the full bucket of water, it was time to open up the door.

The medicine man brought a small flashlight into the lodge as we took a short break. During the break we watched as a flash of white light zipped across the floor from the doorway to the back of the lodge. There were several flashes of blue lights about six inches off the ground—they were the Little People. The medicine person rubbed his hand on the ground and many blue sparks of light jumped up in what looked like a group of fireflies. We laughed and watched in amazement at the show of spirits revealing themselves to us. The lodge was vibrantly alive with happy spirits.

The third round was even more spectacular. Each time I splashed the rocks, they lit up a bright light blue colour. Generally, when the water is splashed on the rocks, they lose their heat, as well as their orange glow. However, during this round the opposite was true—with each splash the grandmothers and grandfathers lit up a brighter and brighter blue intensifying with each ensuing splash of water. We both felt the excitement that came out of the rocks. The ancestors were happy to be helping in the ceremony and the more I splashed, the more spirits came out of the rocks. The heat was intense, but it never burned. I knew that if I continued splashing the grandmother and grandfather rocks, their spirits would have continued to reveal themselves in an electric performance. However, having used up so much of our limited supply of water during the first round, I

was careful to leave one-quarter of the water in the bucket for the fourth round. Furthermore, out of respect for the spirit of the rocks, I did not want to expend their life by exhausting the heat within them. Therefore, I finished off the round rather than expend the life of the ancient ones. It was out of respect for their generosity that I concluded the round with a fourth song.

What we witnessed in this lodge was the emotionality of the natural world, the spirituality of the universe. The spirits chose to reveal themselves to us. This was an experience I will always remember. Even the medicine person had never seen the rocks behave with such intensity. We received many blessings, healing, and I, the meaning to my dream.

What is evidenced in this story is the importance of protocols and that the spirit world is alive. When protocols are followed in the sweat lodge ceremony it then becomes possible to experience the emotions of the natural world, such as when spiritual beings revealed themselves through the rocks—they lit up a blue colour when water was splashed on them. Similarly, Skinner (1925) reported on the significance of the colour “blue” as holy and ceremonial.

The usual word for “holy,” “sacred,” “sanctified,” or “mysterious,” is *hāwā’túk* [Menomini language], in the lodge the term “blue” is often or always used with this connotation. The consecrated tobacco is called “blue tobacco,” the food dedicated to the feasters is “blue food,” and the stone taken into the lodge building to symbolize the sweat bath formerly taken by the members is painted blue. Blue paint is placed on the candidate’s face as a badge of membership. (Skinner 1925:291-292).

We learned that rocks have spirits, they can hear us, and have the ability to speak—human beings develop “spiritual ears and eyes” over time to hear and see spirit in rocks.

What the medicine man and I witnessed, according to a Tsuu T'ina elder (8 February 2008; pers. comm.), was the heart and emotionality of the natural world.

In summary, these stories demonstrate how Spirit Piracy works in the context of the Native sweat lodge ceremony. These stories are meant to spur sweat lodgers to explore why and how their actions might be misappropriating the sacredness of lodge ceremonies through violating protocols. Also, the story about the blue rocks is meant to demonstrate what happens when the divine presence “on their own initiative, reveal Themselves to human beings” (Deloria 2003:85). Bearing witness to the emotionality and heart of the universe is to see that all of creation is interconnected. Thus, the principle of Spirit Piracy relates to an age-old process of spiritual fragmentation and when we see ourselves in this process, it is then that we arrest it. Bearing witness to the magnificence of the sacred is to connect with the powers of the universe—ceremony communicates this.

## Chapter Six: Data Collection and Findings

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the findings and analysis of the data gathered. The data was compiled from eight interviews with participants experienced in sweat lodge ceremonies. It was not measurable as in a quantitative scientific experiment, but rather common experiences among interview participants in the Native sweat lodge ceremony formed the basis for generalizabilities that validate and verify the existence of the social phenomenon researched—that of Spirit Piracy.<sup>25</sup> The Indigenous research methodology of storytelling and face-to-face interviews was used to gather data—much of which is derived from dreams, visions, and communication with the spirit world.

As interview participants were given a choice in how to identify themselves, some chose to use their “Indian or Spirit” names, while others used their given names or remained anonymous. Indian or Spirit names come from the spirit world—they often include animal names or reference to the spirits, such as Dancing Spirit Woman or Eagle Man. They are names that we will be recognized by when we join the spirit world after death.

When I received my Spirit name, “Calling Elk Woman,” it came through a dream that required interpretation by an elder. In the Cree tradition, to properly receive my name, I needed to attend a sweat lodge ceremony and make an offering of tobacco, cloth,

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<sup>25</sup> Although I use the words “validate” and “verify” in this research, I now believe that the words “authentic” and “credible” are more appropriate to Indigenous research. As Peter in Wilson (2008:101) puts it, “...you take three separate views or points and somehow they line up, and if they line up, then your data is accurate...rather than it being valid or reliable, I thought that maybe it’s authentic and credible, and rather than the focus on being reliable, it is relational. How it relates. So that’s the test.” Thus, research with/on Indigenous people is a circular process developed through “relational accountability” (Wilson 2008:101).

and food. During the naming ceremony, I was required to call on the grandfathers and grandmother in each of the four cardinal directions and say my name. The elder relayed other information, responsibilities, and sacred knowledge to me received from the spirit world. In the words of Alvin Manitopyes (2008) “Dreams have spirits and only experienced elder(s) who have the ability to speak with the spirit world can interpret those spiritual messages.”<sup>26</sup>

Research participants were: Alvin Manitopyes (*Assiniboine/Plains Cree/Saulteaux*), Soft White Cloud Woman (*Plains Cree*), John Lerat (*Saulteaux*), Sharron Proulx-Turner (*Métis*), Anonymous (*Tsuu T’ina*) elder, Northern Lights Boy (*Nakota/Stoney*), Terry Willard (*non-Native*), and Rick Lightning (*Ermineskin Cree*), respectively. The following interviews are placed in a strategic order first establishing a foundation of Cree sweat lodge, which then moves to concerns on how modernity has altered traditional ways of conducting this ancient ceremony.

The interview series begins with Manitopyes’ teachings on the “four levels of spiritual communication.” Next, Soft White Cloud Woman speaks on traditional protocols around her sweat lodge set in an urban centre and how the effects of colonialism are negatively influencing lodge ceremonies today. Lerat then shares his views on the ceremony from a unique position outside the lodge as the fire-keeper and doorman. Subsequently, Proulx-Turner discusses protocols, sacred pipes, and women’s

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<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, the New Age movement compromised traditional naming ceremonies by handing out “cool” Indian names as part of the commercialization of Native American culture—this has led to the misappropriation of a Native cultural and spiritual heritages. It is not that Indian names (sometimes referred to as Spirit or Soul names) are available only to Aboriginal people, but it is the trivialization of a complex and spiritual practice that is problematic.

roles around the lodge. After that, an anonymous Tsuu T'ina elder speaks on how both Native and non-Native participants alike are violating protocols and natural laws. Next, Northern Lights Boy talks about traditional beliefs in “good” and “bad” spirits and how modernity has adversely altered this ancient ceremony. Following this is an interview in which Willard offers his views on the sweat lodge from a non-Native perspective believing that any attempt at moving a person forward spiritually is good. Closing the interview series, Lightning tells several stories that demonstrate the power of the spirit world.

Answers given to the research questions by interviewees are meant to provide clarity to the spiritual meaning of the Native sweat lodge. The goal of this research is to emphasize that sweat lodge ceremony is a sacred natural resources—not meant as ventures for commercialization, exploitation, or pirating.

As a reminder, the main research questions posed were:

1. What are the protocols around the sweat lodge ceremony?
2. How does the sweat lodge teach us about natural laws?
3. How has the lodge ceremony transitioned over time?

Sub-questions:

4. What behaviours around the lodge indicate that protocols and natural laws are not well understood?
5. Are there consequences to violating natural laws? If so, what are they?

Before the individual interviews begin, storytelling and storylistening skills need to be discussed. This is important because although the same questions were asked of each

interviewee/participant, many answers are indirectly given. According to Indigenous epistemologies, storytelling and storylistening is a reciprocal and shared responsibility.

a) *On storytelling and storylistening skills*

The transmission of Indigenous cultural knowledge is generally done through storytelling. Storytelling is married to storylistening, as both are reciprocal in responsibilities—they follow a natural law of reciprocity. Storylisteners bear a responsibility in learning to listen and derive their own conclusions from what storytellers say, while storytellers bear the responsibility to tell stories in a manner that guides and shapes lessons in social conduct. Johnston (1996) explains that,

When that child sat before the storyteller to listen to stories, that child gave his spirit and his mind and himself to that story and the storyteller...it was for the child and each individual to seek that morsel of understanding and to draw his own inferences and start fashioning his being and his world. (Johnston 1996:46).

Not unlike children, researchers must develop and sharpen their storylistening skills to analyze data given during interviews.

Elders often speak in a way that requires decoding of messages. Elders may at times give answers that are not related to the immediate question—this is sometimes done to bide time while they think about the original question, only to come back later with an answer to the question posed. Researchers must be as clear as possible in asking good, respectful probing questions while remaining flexible to receive all information that may not seem to fit at the time of the interview. The researcher must keep in mind

that answers also come from spirit, which may take even longer to realize its impact and depth of wisdom.

The following interviews are strategically ordered in that the progressions of the interviews are structured in a manner that first sets the foundation of a traditional Cree sweat lodge. We then move into the lodge to understand the meaning of the four rounds from a Cree perspective (keeping in mind that each lodge is different, even though it may be from the same nation). As the interviews progress, I demonstrate how the influence of modernization is changing traditional teachings. I place direct passages from interviewees in italics for two reasons: first, to make them stand out as direct quotes from the interviewees; and secondly, to cue readers to read these passages as though they are listening to the interviews in person.

Although all interviewees were asked the same research questions, the answers covered a variety of themes and topics. I therefore add comments to clarify information given by the elders and also to demonstrate how inappropriate behaviours of sweat lodgers constitute acts of Spirit Piracy. We now move to the findings and the analysis of the qualitative data.

*b) Interview series*

The series of eight interviews begins with Alvin Manitopyes (*Assiniboine/Plains Cree/Saulteaux*) elder who provides a ceremonial setting for the traditional Cree sweat lodge ceremony. Manitopyes describes the four levels of spiritual communication and shares his views on how the lodge ceremony has transitioned over time, as well as stresses the importance of observing protocols.



### 6.1 Alvin Manitopyes (Assiniboine/Plains Cree/Saulteaux)

Alvin Manitopyes grew up on the Kawacatoose and Muskowekwan First Nations in southern Saskatchewan. Manitopyes is a traditionalist initiated into the sweat lodge way of life as a young boy by his elders. Forty years later, he says that he is still learning about the spiritual energies of this ceremony. During a spiritual fast in the mountains, Manitopyes was given the mandate and right to conduct sweat lodge ceremonies by his ancestors in the spirit world. The main themes of this interview focused on the protocols of the sweat lodge and the Crees' relationship to natural laws. Manitopyes talked about the four levels of spiritual communication and how the sweat lodge ceremony has transitioned over time. "According to my ancestors," Manitopyes tells us that,

*The sweat lodge ceremony is an ancient purification ceremony used to cleanse the four aspects of a human being—the mind, body, spirit, and emotions. We are all under obligation to protect our spirit from negative energy and impurities from our bodies. During the sweat lodge ceremony, the person that runs the ceremony is working with and manipulating sacred energy to heal people in the lodge. Now if that person doesn't know what he or she is doing, or does not have the right to lead the lodge, there can be consequences because they could not be observing protocols.*

*The four natural laws willed by the Creator to work together are: the fire, earth, air, and water. These four natural laws are a reflection of creation itself that work together to maintain balance; each is a harmonization of sacred energies. The willows of the sweat lodge frame and the heated rocks brought into the lodge represent the natural laws of earth. Fire is connected to the sun, which gives life to human beings by its warmth, its ability to make things grow, and as a symbolic representation of the Creator's everlasting light that burn within us. Water is a natural element/law used to splash onto the hot rocks that creates steam, another sacred element. Air is the fourth natural law, which gives us life. Mat'su'win, in the Cree language means life—it is the breath of life. So when we go into the sweat lodge we are breathing the breath of life.*

*Each of these natural laws carries within them sacred energies. Whenever a human being is sick or is not thinking right, we consider that person to be out of balance. So when we go into the sweat lodge, we are turning to the natural laws to restore balance within ourselves and to promote healing. The sweat lodge*

*creates an environment for healing to occur. So it's the acknowledgement of those four natural laws, which is an integral part of the traditional protocol according to the Plains Cree and Saulteaux Indians.*

Protocols are based in ancient agreements with the Creator. Human beings were instructed to care for all sacred beings and the four basic elements of fire, earth, air, and water. Protocols are about gaining permission to come into relationship with the sacred energies of the natural laws.

*When we gather rocks for the sweat lodge, we offer tobacco and we ask for permission to use them in a sacred manner. First of all, we acknowledge the Creator and Mother Earth, and then we speak to the spirit of the rocks asking permission to take a certain number of them. We tell the rocks the purpose of what we are going to use them for.*

Manitopyes goes on to say that he has noticed a lack of knowledge on protocols among some people who run sweat lodges.

*When they gather the rocks they throw them around in the back of a truck and so when I see that, I try to point that out—to treat the rocks with the utmost respect because there's a spirit in each one of those rocks—there's an energy. Why throw them around when we expect the Grandfather rocks to heal us? Also, when we are done with the rocks we should bury them or put them in the water so that they can be re-energized by Mother Earth.*

This energy is of a spiritual nature, which we understood in the context of the four levels of spiritual communication as was taught to Manitopyes by his Cree elders. The four levels of spiritual communication in an ascending order are: 1) the original people – *Ai-seen-no-wuk*; 2) the spiritual masters or elders – *Ka-sane-no-wuk*; 3) the spirit world – *Manito pa-wa-ga-nuk*; and 4) the Creator – *No-tawi-nan Si-Manito*.

*From the weakest to strongest in ability to communicate with the Creator, we find at the base level are the “original people,” the *Ai-seen -no-wuk*. On the next level are the “spiritual masters” or “elders,” the *Ka-sane-no-wuk*. Spiritual masters or elders are those who have seen the light of the Creator—they are rare and especially gifted people, as they see the spirit world through human eyes. Now these elders, the *Ka-sane-no-wuk*, they have the ability to communicate with*

*the next highest level, that of the “spirit world.” The Manito pa-wa-ga-nuk or holy spirits hears the prayers of the elders and in turn interprets them for the “Creator” who is referred to as the No-tawi-nan Si-Manito who resides in the highest level of the heavens. Those four spiritual levels of communication are the natural order of spiritual communication.*

*In the old days, people had a lot of respect for the Creator and out of that respect was a fear of the Creator that was natural. When the original people went out and they got their own vision, it was the elders who interpreted for them. An average Joe Indian couldn’t talk directly to the Creator because his voice wasn’t strong enough to address the Creator.*

*Through years of training in ceremonies, fasts, and vision quests, the Ka-sane-nuwuk have developed an ability to speak with and receive messages from the spirit world, which allowed them to interpret dreams and visions. That’s why the original people went to the elders because the elders could talk to the spirit world. The spirits interpreted the prayers in the right way and sent them up to the Creator. From there, the Creator bestows blessings upon the people.*

*During the sweat lodge ceremony, spirits are presented with offerings like cloth, tobacco, and berries. Cloth offerings are called prayer-cloth or Way-pin-as-su-win. Prayers are spoken into the cloth and held up to honour the spirits. We offer the Way-pin-as-su-win to the spirit world. An offering is put in a clean place—so we hang it up in a tree, so that the spirits will acknowledge it, and enjoy that offering. The spirits read<sup>27</sup> the prayers that have been attached to the offering. The Manito pa-wa-ga-nuk then interprets the prayers and takes them up to the Creator.*

*In ceremony, there are seven directions of spiritual acknowledgement starting with the Creator up above and Mother Earth downwards. To the south are the little animals that run upon Mother Earth; to the west are the water beings; to the north are the four-legged, the buffalo, bear, horse, and other four-legged animals; and to the east are the winged ones—the most spiritually evolved of all the birds and animals. And of all of them is the eagle, Ke-he-o—the chief of all birds, the winged ones is the eagle. From there, you acknowledge your own spirit inwards—this makes for a complete prayer.*

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<sup>27</sup> When Manitopyes says that, “the spirits read the prayers that have been attached to the offering” this is meant literally, but not as in reading pictographs or rock paintings. The person who is asked to pray with the cloth offering puts prayers into the cloth directly by talking to the cloth while holding it up to the Creator. It is as though the invisible breath leaves a message in the cloth that is readable by the spirits.

*So these are the teachings I received. I just try to keep them as the way it was given to me. So that's the understanding behind the four levels of spiritual communication.*

*The four levels of spiritual communication interact with the sweat lodge ceremony, in that protocols work together as an interdependent relationship with natural laws.*

However, Manitopyes is concerned about a lack of knowledge regarding protocols, which is weakening the ceremony.

*When you go to a ceremony there's a lot more going on than what you see. Giving an analogy of a waterfall—you see the waterfall, but you don't see the individual water-drops. If you could see the individual drops, you would see that there's a lot more behind it. It's in the details. There's more to what you see to a waterfall. In an Indian worldview of looking at something, Indians look at the details behind it and the teachings behind it—ancient traditions behind those sweat lodge ceremonies. The teachings, the intent, the purpose, and the respect—all those things come into play to become living energy. We have to observe the ancient knowledge of all that of the unseen.*

*Like those rocks inside the sweat, they are the windows to the universe. We put smudge on them—different kinds of smudge too for different purposes. When you put smudge on the rocks you have to have the right intent because people smudge with that, so you have to have a prayer with it, you can't just throw stuff on the rocks. If people are just throwing stuff on the rocks, what is their intent? Why are they doing it? Maybe they don't know why they are doing that. But they have to have a reason. Usually, you should say, "This is the purpose for this smudge" and attach a prayer to it. That's why each time you pour water on the rocks, splash them with water, you must have a reason for each time you splash. Four times for the Creator—you don't just splash for the sake of splashing.*

*That's what I mean; people are just going through the motions. But there again, you know, you have to look at the person that's doing it. If that person has sincere intent to help people and to pray, they're in the right frame of mind to pray to promote healing, you know, and then sometimes those actions are okay because they have the right intent. They want to help people. If the intent is good, the action has a lot to say, it's powerful.*

The sweat lodge ceremony has transitioned over time from when Manitopyes was first introduced to this way of life. Today, men, women and children of all nations are welcome in his lodge, but in the past ...

*Only men participated in sweat lodges. Women had their own ways of purifying themselves through monthly menstrual cycles. Lodges were small and for private use only among family and friends, holding up to four or five people. Only four large rocks were used. After the ceremony the rocks were buried in the earth or placed in water to cleanse and rejuvenate their energy. The willow frame was used only once and left standing somewhat like a monument representing something spiritual that had happened there. Willows were changed to maintain their strong energy, as over time and frequent sweats, willows become dry and brittle causing people to get tired as well. Access to willows, wood, and rocks is more difficult in urban centres, a reason why many lodge holders only change their willows once a year.*

*Because the lodge has its own unique energy, each lodge is different than the one that was held last week or three years ago. Every ceremony is different and each sweat lodge holder does the ceremony different. Each lodge is unique, but the underlying principle is that we have to respect all sweat lodges—they are all equal in the eyes of the spirit world.*

*The thing is that you have to respect each other's vision. That's the main thing. But today, it has gone haywire you know. People have lost the traditional understanding—they don't know the protocol. A lot of people are observing what's going on and they like to be in that position and they think well I'd like to run a ceremony someday, run a sweat, which is good to think like that. But, try to do it the right way according to the Elders of your people. You have some people that observe and then they copy. Then they go and run a ceremony. In a way they are fooling the people; but in the end, they are only fooling themselves.*

In saying this, Manitopyes cautions people who “play around with” and “change these ceremonies to suit themselves,” as there are consequences to doing this, “either the lodge keeper will get sick or family members will.”

*Today, there are some crazy elders, they'll only run a women's sweat for women only and here's a male elder running the sweat with just women in there. That's totally wrong, that's not a women's sweat. So you know you have to be careful about changing things around. Through the ages and generations, eventually these lodges became co-ed with men and women sweating together. It is imperative to teach people how to properly acknowledge the natural world and to respect natural laws.*

*There's one thing I was raised with and told is never, never ask for money, charge, or set a rate for those who come to sweat. What you do when you do that is you weaken the ceremony and defeat its purpose—the spirits know everything of that's going on. Although you can accept those gifts that are offered to you.*

*So you can't hide from the Creator. The elders say that the Creator knows everything that's going on behind every blade of grass.*

*There are young people that get foolish and the next thing you know they are running sweats in Europe and they're charging people \$60 or \$80 to come to their sweat and they advertise. Spirits don't want anything to do with that—commercialization of the sacred ceremonies is not the real thing. So people are just doing it for their own money and to promote themselves, or some use the ceremony as a place to meet women—this behaviour is an abuse of the sacred ceremony, which is a gift to the original people of Turtle Island.*

Furthermore, Manitopyes adds that the abuse of sacred ceremonies is a reflection of what is going on in society today. How humans are treating the natural environment and exploiting Mother Earth is a reflection of a world that is slowly going out of balance.

*The thing to understand about natural laws is that each action has a reaction. That's just the way it is. So people have to always be held accountable for whatever they're doing in ceremony. That's why they have to be careful. That's why the elders always said, "You have to be careful, pay-ya-tik nosimyin (grandchild), be careful." Think before you do something. That is the right thing to do. Try and get direction as to how you are going to conduct a sweat lodge ceremony. If you are there to show off, you know you're going to pay for it. You will pay for it in some manner when you get older.*

*If you rush a ceremony, just to rush through quickly to get it over with, there again you're going into that natural law and the consequences could be that you'll shorten your own life because you rushed through a ceremony to get it over with. You have to allow the natural energy to work freely, the energy of the Creator to work freely. Once you try to control that energy by rushing it, you go against it. There are a lot of teachings that goes with these ceremonies. Also, I never make promises to people because to do that is to overstep the Creator. That's what I mean, there's a lot more to that waterfall.*

To rush a sweat lodge ceremony is about human beings imposing their own self will over that of the Creator and natural laws. As Manitopyes has told us in this interview, the sweat lodge ceremony is ancient. It was first used as a means of purification and to restore balance within the human on the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental levels.

Manitopyes' use of the Cree language holds spiritual power in itself as words have spirits and sacred energies within them. Henderson (2006:135-145) states that "embodied spirits" are within words, thoughts, bone, blood, songs, rocks, water, and each other. Likewise, in Peat (1994) he speaks about entering worlds of different energies and how we must acknowledge these ancient spirits.

Manitopyes' work with the lodge has transitioned over time for when he began sweating only men were allowed in the lodges. Now his lodge is open to "any human being that walks on this earth, both male and female, and children of all nations." He does however caution those who "play around with spirits," as there are consequences to such actions.

In closing, this Assiniboine/Plains Cree/Saulteaux elder adds,

*There is a greater need for sweat lodge ceremonies in the city where there is a bigger population of Aboriginal people who are disconnected from their own people in the communities. So it should be that these ceremonies are done in the right and proper way. There are not too many people that can actually conduct these ceremonies the right traditional way by observing traditional protocols. You know, you have people selling these ceremonies and traditionalists think they are crazy because these people don't know what they are doing. We're trying not to criticize too much, but we have to teach people the right teachings so they can understand.*

*So that's why I feel it's important to share with you all this information so that you can pass it onto other people—so they can have a better understanding about sweat lodge ceremonies. It's my hope that it will be respected in a good way and used for the purposes it's for. You know we need these ceremonies more than ever. As the days go by and in the years to come, there's going to be a far greater demand for these kinds of ceremonies. So we have to educate these younger people you know, in what's the right thing to do—to do things in the right way.*

*That's how I was raised in that old school type of thinking, traditional thinking. Those old elders, the Ka-sane-no-wuk, always said "Mahti ahk-ka-may-a mok Nehiyaw mat-su-win" (try to continue in this Cree way of life) and try to do things the right way.*

Thus, Manitopyes felt it was important to take part in this research, as he wished to advocate for keeping tradition and Cree traditional teachings of the sacred ancient ways, strong.

## **6.2 Soft White Cloud Woman (*Plains Cree*)**

Next is an interview with Soft White Cloud Woman who discusses the meaning of the “four rounds” from a Cree perspective.<sup>28</sup> She shares with us protocols, the pain and cultural disruption of colonization and residential schools to Aboriginal peoples, and what she sees taking place in lodges today.

Soft White Cloud Woman is 66 years old, born in Broadview, Saskatchewan. As a child, she remembers adults holding sweat lodge ceremonies in secrecy as Native spiritual ceremonies and dances were banned by the Canadian government (1895-1951). Those who defied the ban feared being jailed, fined, or having their ceremonial items confiscated by Indian agents. As a survivor of the residential school system herself, Soft White Cloud Woman speaks on how colonialism still impacts the sweat lodge ceremony today. She, her brothers, and sister have led lodge ceremonies for over the past thirty years. They help people to attain wellness on their healing journeys.

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<sup>28</sup> The ceremony is divided into “four rounds” each of which represents one of the four cardinal directions—east, south, west, and north. The length of each round varies—it can last two minutes to two hours—it all depends on the spirits. Generally, four songs are sung in each round. During the rounds, the door is closed so that it is pitch dark inside the lodge. There is only the illumination of the glowing orange hot rocks until water is splashed on them at which point the heat is released, steam is formed, and the rocks begin to cool losing their orange glow.



We begin the interview with talk about protocols and natural laws around the sweat lodge before discussing the effects of colonialism, residential schools, and the misappropriation of First Nations cultural and spiritual ceremonies.

*Protocol around the sweat lodge begins with respect for yourself. This respect is extended to each other, the lodge itself, and all the aspects of ceremony. How we treat the natural world is a reflection of the respect we have for ourselves. We come to the sweat lodge to pray. Protocols focus on the preparation of coming into relationship with the sacred energies of the natural world. To gain access to the spirit world, we pray and acknowledge the spirits of the rocks, willows, water, the land, pipes, medicines, drums, rattles, and the area around the sweat lodge.*

*Fire, the fire is the first one. I pray to the fire spirit, and the grandfather rocks in there. Then I start praying to all the four directions with my pipe. When I'm done, I'll put my pipe away or sometimes I will leave it out. When everybody has arrived and the lodge is going to start, I ask a man to fill his pipe and if a woman gets here with a pipe, I ask her to fill hers. This way everybody gets to smoke a pipe, which I think is very important because the pipe and the tobacco sends our prayers to the Creator and calls the spirits in to come and help us during the sweat lodge ceremony. I've had some people say, "no I don't smoke," and they push the pipe away. But if you don't smoke, respect the pipe and acknowledge it by touching each of your shoulders with the end of the pipe stem.<sup>29</sup> The pipe keeps going around until it goes four times in the lodge. Then the grandfather rocks come in the lodge. The spirit of the grandfathers are blessed and welcomed with cedar.*

*Protocol has to do with knowing how to behave around the sweat lodge. Attending the sweat lodge ceremony is comparable to attending a religious church mass or service. It means developing respect to the sacredness of our surroundings through appropriate behaviour and etiquette. There is no shouting, no swearing, and no drugs or alcohol on site, as these things carry negative spirits that challenge the good spirits called-in to a lodge. Dress codes become part of the protocol. Men and women must remain conscious of how they dress, sit, and speak within and outside the lodge. People come to the sweat lodge in many different ways, but ultimately it is by no mistake—they are there because spirit has called them.*

*I tell the women in a kind way 'cover your feet, put your skirt down.' You see some women come in and sit there like this (motions sitting with feet together and*

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<sup>29</sup> To acknowledge the pipe means to hold it and touch each shoulder with its stem, then to hold the pipe up in the air praying to its spirit. The pipe is then passed along to the next person.

*knees spread apart) or they have their feet sticking out—that's another one that bugs me.*

*But there are other things—like how people handle the pipe, stuff like that I disagree with, but I always think it has to come from them. They have to realize these things themselves and then they'll get it right. If they respect themselves and see themselves for who they are, then they'll come full circle.*

*Other than that, some of them just come because their friend was here or their friend is coming. You know they just come rushing to the lodge without anything or else they're trying to gain something, trying to understand, but in this day and age, where we are now, everything is so fast.*

*Some say, "Oh, I've got to be back at five o'clock." I tell them, I don't see a big clock in here. It doesn't work that way. We don't rush a lodge—it's on Creator's time.*

*I don't know if you were here with us when we had a lodge. We went in at six o'clock in the evening. My brother was here and there wasn't that many of us. There must have been about seven or eight of us. We came out at 1:20 AM. It seemed like we had just gone in. It was perfect. It was unbelievable. That showed me that with the Creator, there's no time.*

Learning about protocols around the sweat lodge is a shared responsibility.

*Participants may ask the elder about the process of the lodge ceremony, but most of the responsibility rests with the person who brings another to the lodge to tell him or her how to dress, what to bring, and what to expect. Traditional elders do not feel it is their full responsibility to tell others how to behave, as this is the individual's journey, which they must discover for themselves. Inappropriate behaviour results in a consequence of self-humiliation.*

Such is what took place when a woman told others that she had received a pipe from Soft White Cloud Woman's lodge, when in reality this was false.

*I know that I didn't give a pipe to this person. She's running around telling everyone that I gave her this pipe and I didn't. It was brought to my attention. I say, Kee-un—in my country, in the Cree language, it means never mind. I said that's the telling of the truth, I know I didn't give her a pipe. A pipe is very spiritual. I don't think anybody should be doing that. I personally know that I did not give her a pipe. I think she may have gotten it from the Internet.*

*When someone offers to share a pipe, there will be no lies between you and me. It will be only truth. She brings this pipe along and we know where it comes from.*

*Out of respect we might smoke it and pass it on. But she knows that she didn't work for it, she didn't dance for it, she didn't fast for it—she didn't do anything to earn it. She knows it. She will be humiliated because somebody is going to laugh at her and say, "I know you didn't get that from Soft White Cloud Woman, you didn't get that from her lodge, I know that." That is something that she is going to have to live with.*

Consequences to such actions, this elder tells us is humiliation because the community will know that she is lying. Protocols are therefore upheld by community integrity.

Thus, ethical behaviour is especially imperative around ceremonial practices. Unlike Christian faiths that have the Holy Bible, Indigenous cultures do not have written texts. Therefore protocols and processes around sacred ceremonies are unwritten laws, they are learned experientially.

Moving now to the willow frame of Soft White Cloud Woman's Cree sweat lodge, we learn about the meaning of the four horizontal rungs. Starting from the lower rung and working our way to the top—these rungs inside the lodge coincide with the four rounds:

*Kindness is number one—Caring is the second—Sharing is the third—and up there, is the fourth, the Telling of the Truth. The telling of the truth is a big one.*

During the first round participants are welcomed into ceremony with kindness. Soft White Cloud Woman tells newcomers what to expect from the ceremony and how it will be led. She continues to pray to the Creator, the ancestors, and the Little People<sup>30</sup> splashing water on the grandmother and grandfather rocks—each splash represents a precise purpose. Soft White Cloud Woman splashed for the Creator, for each of the rocks that have come into the lodge, for the four directions, and for Mother Earth. She

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<sup>30</sup> "Little People" are small spirit people considered in Aboriginal cultures as good. European folklore literature refers to the little people as fairies, elves, leprechauns, and gnomes.

calls-in the spirits from the four directions praying for spiritual balance in the eastern doorway, emotional balance in the southern doorway, physical balance in the western doorway, and mental balance in the northern doorway. Animal spirits are called-in, as well as ancestral beings.

*There are many teachings in every aspect of the sweat lodge. Each doorway itself can be filled with teachings. The in-between doorways are extremely powerful and learned about in Sundance ceremonies—they include the south-eastern doorway, the south-western doorway, the north-western doorway, and the north-eastern doorway. These alone would take days to teach about—they are so powerful.*

*The second round is about caring and praying for all our relations. Our relatives include ourselves and other human beings, all the animals, the sun, moon, and stars, Mother Earth, and the four basic elements of water, fire, air, and land.*

*Before the door is closed for the third round, fish and berries are brought into the lodge. Participants first pray with the food then offer some of it to the grandmother and grandfather rocks to feed the spirits. Afterwards, everyone partakes in eating the ceremonial food. Following this, the door is closed and the round continues. The third round is known as the Healing round where sharing takes place about what has brought each and every one of us to the lodge—prayers are said for a multitude of reasons that center on healing.*

*The fourth rung represents the Telling of the Truth. We express our gratitude and thank the Creator and the spirits for the healing that has taken place. Four sacred songs are sung during each round. Although there is an order to the sweat lodge ceremony, it is the spirits that ultimately direct the person pouring/splashing the water.*

*You can't come in here (the sweat lodge) with an agenda or you will get confused. There is no clock inside. The grandmother and grandfather rocks are the ones who control the ceremony. It takes years to understand the spirit world, how to work with it, and how to hear and learn from the spirits.*

It is not uncommon to hear the flapping of an eagle wing or the growl of Grandmother Grizzly Bear from the western doorway, as people receive healing in the lodge. The sweat lodge is about purification and spiritual renewal within us through this sacred ceremony.

Each lodge is different depending on how it was given to or transferred to the lodge holder; each lodge must be respected. Often times, newcomers interrupt the sweat lodge ceremony and insist on singing a song, telling others what to say, or throwing medicines on the rocks without asking permission to do so. What this does is create havoc and confusion among the spirits. It disrespects and pirates the spirit of the medicines, the rocks, and the direct link the person leading the lodge has with the spirit world. These behaviours often result in chasing the spirits away that were called into the ceremony to assist in the healing process.

Moving now to the effects of colonization, Soft White Cloud Woman believes that the greatest rupture in the transfer of cultural and spiritual knowledge among First Nations populations occurred in the late 1800's when the Canadian Government placed a ban on Indian spiritual dances and ceremonies. This ban coincided with government policy that forced Native children to attend residential schools. When Soft White Cloud Woman returned home after eleven years in residential schools, she felt embarrassed to speak her own Cree language. In jest, many people in her community called her *Mun-yash-squeo* (White woman)<sup>31</sup> because of her funny accent when speaking Cree. The English language had been forced upon the children and speaking Native languages in schools was forbidden. Soft White Cloud Woman believes the effects of residential schools and colonization will take many years to heal from. She includes herself in this process remembering a time when someone during a sweat lodge ceremony spoke about the abuses suffered in a boarding school.

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<sup>31</sup> Soft White Cloud Woman did not know how to spell the Cree words she used and recommended that I write the words phonetically.

*I thought I was over that, but I started crying. I've got lots of healing to do myself because I was going so fast that I never looked back. I didn't want to look back. Then when they made me look back, it made me cry. I did feel sorry for myself. But I didn't have a choice. I couldn't say no that I didn't want to go to boarding school. My parents said I had to go or they would have to go to jail.*

The abuses suffered during the residential school era stand as examples on how the spirit of the children was pirated. Native children were deprived of parental guidance and love and also cultural teachings, particularly ceremonial knowledge.

As a young girl, Soft White Cloud Woman remembers stories from her grandmothers who told her, “It was the grandmothers who had a lodge to heal the sick people—years and years ago before it became outlawed.” Some Cree nations allowed only men in the lodges, while medicine women healers in other Cree nations led lodges themselves. Today, when Soft White Cloud Woman hears men say that women are not allowed in lodges, not allowed using drums, or having pipes, she tells them to “remember where you came from.” She believes that women should take part in all aspects of the lodge ceremony, as they too need healing and often times are the heads of households and bear the responsibility to teach their children about the cultural ways of their ancestors.

*Soft White Cloud Woman tells of when, “Indians were ashamed to be Indian, but now to be Indian is popular.”*

Leading lodges in a large urban centre, she has noticed an increased demand for lodge ceremonies by Aboriginal peoples wanting to reconnect with their ancestral heritage and by many non-Aboriginals who are in search of a new way of spiritual expression, as they reject their own Christian religious roots. Some people come to the lodge claiming to have been an Indian in a past-life.

*There's people who come to the lodge and become instant healers and instant Natives. All through their lives they didn't want to be Native, they wanted to be*

*something else. All of a sudden they wake up one morning and decide to be Cree. I always say, "Good luck!"*

*Some folks want to learn about Native spirituality so they can give workshops on cultural traditions not of their own—often turning a financial profit of which none of it makes its way back to our community to purchase wood, food, or fuel to cover costs of driving out of town to gather rocks and medicines for sweat lodge ceremonies.*

*A growing problem in urban centres is the commercialization of the sweat lodge ceremony. As the demand for sweat lodges increases, there is greater pressure placed on Native elders to perform these healing ceremonies. Many elders find the pressure too great. Others are beginning to charge for lodges.*

*A lot of people come to the sweat lodge out of curiosity. Or else, they're seeking information to start their own business in something. People will say, "Okay, I'm going to give workshops and charge you \$150.00 for a weekend and teach you about spirituality which is kindness, caring, sharing, and telling of the truth." Well not one of them has been given these teachings. It doesn't work that way, I've seen it, and it doesn't work that way. I always say, Ti-timma-kish—in Cree it means pitiful person – it's not a nice thing to say, but I've noticed that I'm saying it a lot lately.*

Soft White Cloud Woman does not set a price on a sweat lodge ceremony believing that consequences to such actions would make her lose her power, her gift of being kind to people. She is concerned for those who commercialize the sacred. She believes that this causes a person to "move far away from themselves." In this statement, Soft White Cloud Woman refers to a person not being true to him or herself. They are not being true to their hearts and are doing things they know nothing about, claiming to be something they are not. This is when a person's ego has taken control and has moved him or her from the spiritual self.

In review of the time spent with Soft White Cloud Women, she talked about a few protocols around the lodge and the significance of the four rungs in relation to the four rounds. Although not directly stated, teachings on the fire, the pipe and tobacco, and our

relationship with the natural world are about natural laws. Emotional pain from the experience of residential schools for Native peoples created a rupture in the transfer of cultural and ceremonial knowledge. This was observed when Soft White Cloud Woman spoke about the residential school experience that brought tears to this elder's eyes. The deep wounds carried with colonization remain today and are being re-enacted in the form of commercialization of the sacred.

### **6.3 John Lerat (*Saulteaux*)**

Next, we have an interview with John Lerat (*Saulteaux*) elder. His perspective is unique in that he observes the sweat lodge ceremony from outside the lodge, as a fire-keeper and doorman. Lerat sees differences and similarities between Native and Western<sup>32</sup> worldviews from outside the sweat lodge—much of which is disconcerting to him.

John Lerat is 68 years old, born in Broadview, Saskatchewan. A former student of the residential school system, he did not practice the sweat lodge tradition growing up. Lerat has been a fire-keeper and doorman to his wife's lodge for the past fifteen years. His perspective is unique, as he works outside the lodge with the fire and rock spirits. Standing beside the fire pit where the grandmothers and grandfathers rocks are heating up in preparation for the sweat lodge ceremony, he looks across several open fields, past a large city centre, and onto the Rocky Mountains of Western Canada.

*People come to the sweat looking for help and spiritual guidance and they leave happy, this makes me happy... It's for the people. We do it for the people.*

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<sup>32</sup> The use of the term "Western" refers to a worldview that sees the physical and spiritual realms as separate. In Native worldviews, these two realms are considered intertwined. Western worldviews are positivistic requiring scientific proof, whereas Native cosmologies accept spiritual anomalies without empirical justifications.



Major themes that arose during this interview focused on protocols, natural laws, contrasting worldviews, and responsibilities around the sweat lodge ceremony.

According to Lerat,

*Respect is fundamental to protocols. Mother Earth and the natural elements of fire, water, land, and air must be respected. After all, these elements have been around for much longer than we have. We have much to learn from them.*

*Respect of each other, oneself, and the sacred gift of life are imperative for survival. Respect is the greatest teaching we receive from the sweat lodge—to respect the gifts given to us by the Creator. Following respect is kindness, sharing, love, and forgiveness.*

*People come here and they are all the same ... professors, teachers, lawyers, who cares ... they all go in the sweat lodge and they pray. It doesn't matter if they're rich, poor, or whatever. Money, riches, and political power are of no importance to the spirit world. Everyone is welcomed and treated with kindness and respect.*

As Lerat sits outside the lodge tending to the fire he waits to hear his wife call out,

“Honey, open the door,” he thinks about the Creator.

*When I'm working out there, hearing the people sing and pray, it makes me think. I think of the Creator, that's all, the Creator is looking out for these people. When I throw tobacco in the fire, I ask the Creator to give them a good sweat. Like I said, it always feels good, I feel good to see the people happy. So I'm answering in circles, but it's all the same, that's how I feel about it anyway.*

When asked about how the sweat lodge teaches us about natural laws, Lerat responded by talking about his relationship with the fire spirit and the natural world.

*It comes to respect—respect the trees, the rocks, the grass, and the earth—Mother Earth. You gotta look after it, you gotta pray. You have to respect the fire spirit, or burn. There's spirits in there, there's got to be.*

*The rocks, the fire, the wood, and water—they all come together. If you had no wood you couldn't make a fire. If you had no fire, you couldn't heat the rocks. If you had no rocks, you couldn't sweat ... it all works together.*

In this example, Lerat tells us that failure to respect the fire spirit can result in a consequence of getting burned—this is a natural law. The fire and rock spirits work together. Tinker (2004:106) asserts that rocks have a consciousness and the ability to talk. Rocks are considered ancient beings, grandparents, and a repository of great wisdom and balance (Tinker 2004:108).

Rocks are as old as the creation of the universe—this wisdom is that of the Creator spirit. In essence, to disrespect the spirits of fire and the rocks is to pirate the individual spirits that reside in the natural world. Therefore, just as the elements of the natural world harmoniously work together, they set an example for human beings to follow.

The process of the sweat lodge ceremony teaches us how to be better spiritual human beings through respect, kindness, sharing, love, and forgiveness. Community works together in preparing for the ceremony. They take the rocks out of the pit from the previous sweat, build and tend to the fire, sweep out the sweat lodge, gather rocks, and prepare berries and salmon for the ceremony, and a feast after the sweat. As part of our ontological responsibilities to community, everyone is expected to share in the tasks and contribute to buying or getting wood, picking rocks, and gathering sage.

*The work should not all be left to one or two people. We are old and need help from the young people.*

Sitting outside of the lodge, Lerat observes the two opposing worldviews of colonialism and Native spirituality coming together, some of which causes him concern. He questions the motives of those who arrive with pipes they have bought from the Internet and who speak like ‘Indian experts’ on Native culture and spirituality.

*It's funny the non-Natives come with brand new stuff and pipes and things they don't deserve ... it's for showing off ... it doesn't work like that ... it doesn't mean anything in the spiritual way. You gotta earn all this stuff, you gotta earn a pipe, you gotta earn everything ... you can't buy spirituality ... it's not a game ... you have to put your heart into it. To buy stuff like that to me is a no, no.*

Lerat also is concerned about social changes taking place around sweat lodge ceremonies in the inner city. The following addresses several of Lerat's concerns about changes taking place within sweat lodges. For instance, how the words God and Jesus has made its way into the Native sweat lodge.

*There's nothing wrong with believing in God or Jesus, but what I find funny sometimes is you go somewhere and you do things the Native way, and then someone says God did this and God did that. That's not the Native way, right? ... It's the White man's way.*

*I don't know why they do that. I think there's just one Creator. People got different ways of saying the Creator – God, Jesus, or whatever. If you're going to talk Native, then it should always be the Native way, not Jesus Christ thrown in there. Let's respect our Native ways.*

When considering that contacting spirits is against Christian belief systems, then a sweat would be in direct contravention to the basic teachings of Jesus. Lerat's concerns are rooted in respect, and the protection and preservation of First Nations cultural identities through spiritual practices. Lerat is not against various Christian beliefs or any other religious beliefs for that matter; he simply wants to ensure the survival of Native traditions for the future.

Lerat listens as non-Natives claim to have been Native in a past-life or that they have discovered their Native ancestry and want to learn about the sweat lodge. Many Native people also show up at the sweat lodge in search of ancestral pathways to healing and renewal of ancient traditions left by our forefathers. Lerat has observed an increased interest over the past decade in Native culture and spirituality by the general public.

*My grandmother was half Cree ... I was an Indian in a past-life ... now it's popular to be Native ... everybody wants to be an Indian.*

Lerat wonders about professors who come to the lodge, write about it, and then go into the classroom to teach it without having fully understood the ceremony, the importance of ethics and protocols, and the power of the spirit world.

*There are some that come here to learn about the lodge, then go back into the classroom and teach as experts because they are professors. Some people come around the sweat lodge and try to take control telling us how to tend to the fire, the rocks, and run the ceremony the right way. I call them wannabes. They don't have any power, it's just what they've seen, they don't know. We try not to let that happen because it's my wife sweat lodge. The wannabes should go elsewhere. They are using the Native in every which way they can. We don't have to fight ... either they learn or we let them know somehow. You don't like to tell people, but sometimes you try and tell them what you don't like. What is lacking is respect. Respect for Native ceremonies and our ways of life.*

When people attempt to impose colonial ideology onto peoples of differing cosmologies, what is happening is a process of colonization in that colonization has historically attempted to suppress Indigenous ways of knowing. This process is deeply ingrained in the consciousness to where people may or may not be aware of their own actions. Attempting to suppress another's spirit or the spirit of a ceremony through control is to pirate spirit, both the pirate's and the one being pirated.

Another topic that arose in this interview was that of nakedness in co-ed sweats.

This is something that this Saulteaux elder strongly opposes.

*I've heard about that, but I've never seen it. What does that prove? Or what does that do? What is this? I don't think making people go into the sweat lodge naked is natural. I'm sure that some people don't want to go in there naked. That's where there's no respect. If people go in there naked, their mind is not on prayer, is it? They're just looking at one another more or less.*

How do we answer Lerat's question, "What is it?" It appears to be the influence of modernity altering traditional practices. In other words, it is neo-colonialism entering the

lodge. As sweat lodges transitioned over time, Cree women began to enter the lodge, but never traditionally has there been nudity in mixed lodges. Wherever there is nudity in mixed lodges, it is a sign that corruption of decency and respect has collapsed into traditional Native ways of ceremony through an act of human complicity.

*You don't see the real Native sweat lodge holder playing around with this ceremony – they (lodges) are there for a reason. When you play around with it, then something is going to happen. Something will happen to them or their family, or whatever, it will come, something will happen. You don't play around with it. You have to have respect. That's the same like you going into a Catholic Church or something like that and doing something else rather than doing it their way.*

The clash between colonial and Indigenous worldviews continues today. Inappropriate behaviours and the misappropriation of the traditional Native sweat lodge ceremony are observed. Lerat stresses the need for respect among individuals, of sacred ceremonies, and our Mother Earth. Knowledge about the sacred is accessible and available to everyone but human beings are to respect, acknowledge, and pray to the Creator, humbly use the gifts given to us that sustain our life and incorporate everything with gratitude. Lerat holds that the lodge and its teachings on protocols revolve around respect, kindness, love, and forgiveness.

Sitting on the outside of the lodge and tending to the fire spirit, Lerat sees the need for healing within all communities, Native and non-Native alike. “There's no money in the sweat lodge,” Lerat tells us, “What the ceremony teaches us is to respect the laws of nature, to respect each other, our Native ways, and to live with kindness, love, and forgiveness.”

#### **6.4 Sharron Proulx-Turner (*Métis*)**

Next, we turn to an interview with Sharron Proulx-Turner (*Métis*), originally from Ontario. She sheds a different view on the Native sweat lodge ceremony around protocols, women's roles in ceremony, and menstrual women in sweats. Some of Proulx-Turner's views however may be considered controversial in the eyes of many traditional elders in western Canada. We have an opportunity to see how traditional ways of leading a lodge is shifting due to the involvement of participants who introduce modern ways into this ceremony, which in itself can be considered fragmentation. There is a caution in what and how much change and transition is allowed to occur in sweat lodge ceremonies; again this is done with careful consideration as mentioned in Manitopyes' interview.

Proulx-Turner has participated in lodge ceremonies for the past twenty years. She was given the right to lead lodges eight years ago. She is a Sun Dancer, a pipe-holder, a writer, and an academic. Among several teachers, her guiding elder today is Shirley Bear, a Maliseet elder from eastern Canada. This interview focused on protocols and processes of the sweat lodge, sacred pipes, women and ceremony, and behaviours that suggest neo-colonialism is often done unconsciously. Even though religious practices evolve naturally, there is a difference between this and neo-colonialism. The difference being that neo-colonialism is done unconsciously, as the process is embedded in the human psyche. Western society lives according to colonial assumptions and paradigms, often without conscious thought of this.

Proulx-Turner does not call herself an elder but says,

*I'm just a vehicle for what Creator wants me to do, I pray that I can do the right thing, be a good person, follow the ways I was taught, and that I can do it in a*

*good way. I'm an ordinary person who in some ways is asked to do extraordinary things.*

Proulx-Turner tells us that, "Respect is key in the Native value system. It is a concept really difficult to learn." Proulx-Turner shares with us protocols around the sweat lodge:

*The sweat lodge is experiential. No photographs are taken. Learning to lead a lodge takes several years of being involved in community and teachings from Native elders.*

*Each and every time you make a hole in Mother Earth, you offer tobacco, you pray. Pray for Mother Earth. Pray for the willow that's going into the ground. Pray for the lodge that's going to be coming up from that. Pray for all the people that will be going into the lodge. Every single moment and every single act is a prayer.*

*Respect the relationship between the sacred fire and the sweat lodge; not to cross that path between the fire and the lodge while the ceremony is on. How hard is that? And newcomers ask, "Why?" And we tell them why.*

The short answer is that the ancestors travel the path from the sacred fire into the lodge, the "womb of Mother Earth." Metaphorically speaking, the path becomes a highway of travel for spiritual communication between the ancestors of the spirit realm and human beings on the physical plane.

Before each sweat lodge, Proulx-Turner conducts a ceremony to protect the people who are there. She tells us that ...

*Sometimes people who come to the lodge have psychological problems and might try to draw energy from other people and the sweat lodge ceremony. People that go to sweat lodge ceremonies go there to pray, but not everyone goes in there with good intentions. Some go there for their own power. I've heard people say that it makes them feel powerful. I think, wow that's amazing because for me, when I go there I feel very small, I feel like I really don't know anything.*

Proulx-Turner talks about protocols and sacred songs:

*With regards to songs, they are sacred. If you learn a song, then it's yours to sing in ceremonies. If people want to learn songs, then offer tobacco. Sacred songs are not meant to be sung like Madonna songs—these songs are not 'hit parade'*

*songs—nor are they sung like harmonized choir songs. Respect sacred ceremonial songs, as these songs have spirits.*

Proulx-Turner adds that songs often come through dreams. Métis elder, George Blondeau, “White Buffalo” (a beloved and highly respected elder who passed through the western doorway on August 11, 2003) used to say, “When you hear the coyotes howl, offer them tobacco and ask their spirits to teach you a song.”

Proulx-Turner explained some of the differences between personal and ceremonial pipes. This is important because pipes are a large part of sweat lodge ceremonies. Knowing a pipe’s history is to know its spirit.

*When I was gifted with my pipe, I knew its history. I was told where that stone came from, who gathered that stone, why, and how it was put together, all of that. There are two kinds of pipes: the personal and the ceremonial pipe. The way I was taught is that an elder gives you a pipe. That may be a personal pipe and it may be a ceremonial pipe, and they’re different. A personal pipe is yours. You can smoke that pipe with yourself, with your family, and with your friends. The way you are taught to fill it, the way you are taught to use it, that’s your personal pipe. Then there’s a ceremonial pipe—this one is meant to be in service with people. For that pipe you honour its spirit by keeping it in service. Let’s say you decide not to be a part of ceremony anymore, and then it would be your responsibility to pass that pipe on to someone else, to let it continue to be in service. A personal pipe is not a ceremonial pipe and a ceremonial pipe is not a personal pipe, but both have spirits attached to them.*

*When you smoke that sacred pipe, you’re praying with that pipe. When you’re holding that sacred pipe you cannot lie. It’s impossible to lie. If you buy a pipe online or at a store, let’s say maybe somebody hawked their pipe or sold it, and that sacred pipe had a spirit attached to it—that’s a huge responsibility and the person who would buy it would not know anything about its history.*

*Buying a pipe online or in a store (even a pawn shop) is problematic because the buyer is not likely to learn the history of the pipe or know anything about the spirit attached to it. Protocols around pipes are complicated—their use, the songs transferred with them, and whether it is a personal or ceremonial pipe. It works in accordance to natural laws—respect for the spirit of the pipe, the spirit within the pipe, and how that pipe is cared for. To misuse or abuse the spirit of a pipe is to commit an act of Spirit Piracy. In extreme cases, a bad spirit can go*



*into a pipe—this would adversely affect the spirit of the one smoking it. Therefore, it is very important to know the history of a pipe.*

Moving now to topics considered somewhat controversial by many lodge leaders and strict traditionalists are Proulx-Turner's views on: woman and ceremony, protocols around clothing, and former addicts and sexual abuse offenders who are allowed to lead lodges.<sup>33</sup> Sweat lodge ceremonies are generally closed to menstruating women on the argument that blood has a very strong spirit that can cancel out the powers of medicine people leading ceremonies (Peat 1994:132). Proulx-Turner argues that,

*Even women "on their time" (menstruating) are welcomed because that's when you're at you're most powerful. There's a lot of resistance to that and at the same time, there are a lot of teachings to indicate that women on their time never were prevented from entering the lodge before contact, before Christianity made it a dirty thing.<sup>34</sup>*

*Yes, a woman cleanses herself every month when she's on her time. Yet, there are lots of toxins in a city and it's not just actual air toxins or environmental toxins, it's emotional, spiritual, and physical. To be able to go to the sweat lodge to cleanse like that, to be reborn every time you go in there, that's a really important part of trying to survive.*

Next, Proulx-Turner speaks on clothing protocols for women in the sweat lodge:

*Our ancestors do not care how we sit in the lodge or how we dress. What's important is the prayer in there. I've been told by Elders that in some sweat lodges women don't wear anything, they may not be mixed with men, but sometimes they are, that's the way it is, people are taught to go in the lodge and they don't wear anything because they are presenting themselves to the Creator, the way they came into this world, it's not a sexual experience. A woman can't sit a certain way in the lodge because a man sees up her dress if she's wearing one,*

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<sup>33</sup> The mention of former addicts and sexual abuse offenders leading sweat lodges is critical, as this is one of the core problems in sweat lodges today—it is a prime example of "Spirit Piracy" at work. This topic will be discussed at greater lengths in the chapter 7, *Synthesis of Interview Responses*.

<sup>34</sup> Kim Anderson. *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native womanhood*. (Toronto: Second Story Press, 2000). Anderson (2000:75) argues, "Whatever the traditions, menstruation was a sign of the incredible power of the universe. Contact with Europeans was to change this thinking. Judeo-Christian culture saw manifestation of female power, but as a manifestation of female sin, contamination and inferiority."

*even though she has pants or leggings on with her dress, they are really rigid bordering on silly rules. Where did these rules come from?*

Various arguments as to why clothing is worn in sweat lodges boil down to respect of lodge protocols, each other, and the ancestors. In general, Native traditionalists consider nudity in mixed lodges to belong to neo-colonialist, feminist, and New Age thinking. It is considered part of the New Age phenomenon where rules are made to suit human-centered rationalities that do not reflect traditional rituals. Moreover, it is considered a violation of protocols.

Proulx-Turner's thoughts on people leading lodges that come from abusive backgrounds are as follows:

*In the old days before contact, we can only imagine that there were problems. A young person would be groomed to be a spiritual leader. But now, sometimes people come out of addictions and they go to ceremonies and the next thing you know, they are leading a sweat lodge. It's almost as if the sweat lodge life replaces their life of addictions, but they don't change their behaviours. Their focus of addiction changes, but they don't change—they still gamble, they still batter, and they still sexually assault. And what does that do? This is a question we can't answer because some of these people when you get around them, you can feel the power of their spiritual self, you can feel that they are given tremendous gifts, but they are also given a really hard life. So people are healed in a good way and maybe the person who is leading the ceremony is very flawed.*

*Although sweat lodges are a place of healing, they are not to be used as excuses for abusive behaviour to continue. Yes, many abusers also carry incredible gifts, but again the prime responsibility lies in the hands of the lodge leader to uphold a safe environment particularly since the sweat lodge is considered to be the womb of Mother Earth.*

Neo-colonialism, Proulx-Turner argues, "has a life, a spirit of its own." Most often violation of traditional protocol is done unconsciously. Take for example, the renewed and popularized fad of building and leading sweat lodges. Little is known about protocols, prayers, songs, and process of this ancient, traditional practice.

*You can actually go online and get instructions on how to build a sweat lodge. Where does this come from? They really are just building a hut and putting rocks in it and pouring water on those rocks and it's empty there, the ancestors don't come. The spirit of the lodge is the most important element, it is the most important part, you can't buy that, you can't sell that, and you can't co-opt it. The ancestors know where to go, they are not that gullible.*

*I also know non-Native people who carry pipes. Sometimes the way a person is with the pipe—it becomes almost like a Christian evangelist, where instead of actually internalizing the values and what that means, people become militant about how they behave with the pipe. A person says, “Okay this pipe has to be smudged first thing in the morning. So as long as I'm smudging this pipe first thing in the morning and you're not doing that and you have a pipe, what's wrong with you?” So they get it on themselves to go around telling Native people how they ought to be with their sacred pipe. Non-Natives say these things to old Native people even, correcting them on how to use their pipes. It comes back to respect. Sometimes non-Natives fictionalize the teachings and transform them into their own words, which I think non-Native people just don't realize that's not an option.*

*In another example, some lodge leaders have people pray to them before praying to the Creator. That's like neo-colonialism—Christian ways being conflated with Native ways—that's like a Roman Catholic priest being an intermediary between a person and God during confession. In Native traditions we are considered equal and the tobacco, eagle, and thunderbirds act like intermediaries.<sup>35</sup>*

Neo-colonialism is internalized colonization. It often happens unconsciously. A concern among traditional elders is the point at which protocols blur between traditional Native teachings and the mixing of Western religion with Native spiritual practices. Oftentimes the fit remains jagged to the point of creating cultural and spiritual confusion.

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<sup>35</sup> This statement is not to suggest that priests have people pray to them instead of God, as praying to anyone but God in many Christian religions is forbidden. What is meant by this comment is that some lodge leaders place themselves at a higher level as though they are priest or intermediaries between the people and God. In Native traditions such as the sweat lodge ceremony, everyone is equal; so it is inappropriate for any member to act as an intermediary that would listen to “confessions” such as would a Catholic priest. Thus, there is an awkward and inappropriate fusing of different religious belief systems.

I conclude this interview with a short story from Proulx-Turner on how the flood of 2005 left a sweat lodge area in Sundre untouched and intact—a sign that the spirits around the lodge area protected the sweat lodge site, as it was sacred.

*There was a time where two elders decided that I should not be leading lodges. They had not been to this lodge, but threatened to come and tear it down. Just shortly after that, we had a big flood. The whole area in Sundre where we had our lodge flooded. The whole river flooded and the sweat lodge was completely buried. There was a five-foot water line on the tipi that was near the sweat lodge. The flood lifted trees right out of the ground. Trees had fallen everywhere; we couldn't even find a pathway to get to the sweat lodge, that's how much damage had been done by the time everything settled. When we got there, the sweat lodge was completely intact, not even one little rock was out of place, and the altar was intact outside the sweat lodge. The little sticks that hold the pipe were there and even the stick that goes across the top, everything was completely intact. That's when we knew that we were doing the right thing. Like I said earlier, it's the ancestors who know, we're just there to do the work.*

### **6.5 Anonymous (Tsuu Tina) elder**

The next interview was conducted with a Tsuu T'ina elder. His contributions to this research focused on protocols, natural laws, and consequences to violating these. This elder also talked about the need for healing within Native communities, as some “Spiritual Elites” have lost their humility to ego.

Choosing to remain anonymous, this Tsuu T'ina elder has been involved in the sweat lodge ceremony for the past thirty years. His spiritual teachers have included elders from the Tsuu T'ina, Cree, Stoney, and Blackfoot traditions. He incorporates the terms God and Jesus believing that there are two Creators, two Higher Powers—“A good one and one that is not right, we don't say evil in Tsuu T'ina, the one who created the Earth—I say God.”

Central to this interview was a discussion on sweat lodge protocols, natural laws, and human interactions with the spirit world inside the lodge. Protocols are a critical part of the sweat lodge ceremony that creates a pathway to the sacred. They also ward off negativity and bad spirits. A person must know about protocols and their implication to the ceremonial process.

*Many people foolishly think that there are no consequences to playing around with spirits—they don't know. Protocols are unwritten processes that coincide with natural laws. Protocols are the laws of the universe learned through ceremony.*

Protocols create a pathway for humans to follow that guides us into deeper relationships with the energies of the spirit world. Protocols are about cultural identity. For instance, a Paint Song has been transferred to this elder for which he now has the “rights to” as something that was earned and now belongs to him. This means that sacred knowledge and spiritual responsibility is tied to the ceremonial item or ritual received. Thus, this Tsuu T'ina elder owns the song and it has become part of his cultural and ceremonial identity. He must use this knowledge in a respectful and honourable way to help others in their healing.

Protocols are incorporated in a wide variety of processes, one being how the sweat lodge frame is constructed. A person must first speak to the spirit of that willow explaining the reason for dislodging it from its community and taking its life. Tobacco is offered to the spirit of the tree and placed at its base. Willows have spirits, just as do rocks, and wood. We are obligated to honour these spirits and when we do so, a good sweat lodge is ensured because we are following a natural order as instructed by the Creator Spirit.

*The sweat lodge is called the womb of Mother Earth and that's where you know all the understanding of life.*

This elder briefly explained the significance of the four rounds, not unlike those described earlier by Soft White Cloud Woman.

*During the first round, you introduce yourself and the reason why you have come to the lodge, possibly to request special prayers. The second round is where you call-in the spirits so you can open all the doorways.<sup>36</sup>*

*We say, the ceremony has started, the spirits are here, time to be quiet because any loud noise will chase the spirits away. The spirits don't like noise, they don't like whistling, and they don't like smelly things, especially if there are animal bones around; so the sweat lodge area has to be clean.*

*In the second round, a ring of protection is placed around each participant to protect them from bad spirits and to protect the medicine people from getting hit by bad medicine. This is done by saying, "where I sit is holy, therefore I am holy." This puts a ring of protection around that person.*

*Protocol includes praying for everybody—you have to because if you don't, the prayers might get away. So you put a ring of protection around them, it's dangerous these sweats, they're powerful. Like in Tsuu T'ina, when you say dangerous and respectful, it's the same word. So it is out of respect that we place a ring of protection around everybody.*

*The third round is the healing round where medicine people heal those with sickness. They put a hand on the person's head or tap below the throat, you know the power points—this is only done by medicine people who have years of training and know how to work with the spirits.*

*There are consequences to playing around with spirits. You can feel it when there is something not right. Once you load the pipe, the pipe tells you. You don't have to be a medicine man, once you load the pipe and start smoking it, you either get really tired or you get a headache, that's what happens. Or you start hyperventilating, there's many ways the spirits let you know.*

*The fourth round is the closing round. Spirits that were called into the lodge are sent back to the spirit world. Participants express their gratitude, a closing song is sung, and the sweat lodge ceremony comes to completion.*

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<sup>36</sup> "Doorways" refer to the east, south, west, and northern directions where ancestors and animals spirits live. The bear spirit for instance, resides in the western doorway. Again, which animals are called-in will depend on the lodge itself and the teachings transferred to the lodge holder.

Protocols are in all aspects of ceremony found in the preparation of the lodge; how to prepare the fire and the placement of the wood and rocks, and the offering of tobacco to the sacred fire in the four directions and to Mother Earth. How the ceremony is run, what songs are sung to call in the spirits, songs for the purpose of healing, songs to send the spirits home—these aspects of the ceremony are all part of protocol.

As previously mentioned, protocols also include how to sit, what to wear, and when to speak. Violating protocols are a result of disrespecting the process of the ceremony. This will occur when participants interrupt a medicine man, a song, or any part of the ceremony because that person has a compulsion to be heard or a need to control the situation. Taking part in ceremony requires a great deal of self-discipline where we place our focus on the will of the Creator, not that of our own selfish desires. Protocols are unwritten and differ from lodge to lodge—they are learned over time, often a lifetime.

To learn the proper way of ceremony, I asked how a person finds an “authentic” elder. This Tsuu T’ina elder responded by saying this:

*You listen to them. If they start talking like Black Elk, reciting what they’ve read in books, then you must suspect them. Elders talk from their hearts, their stomachs, and their ears. Their messages come from spirit. You have to use your intuition and ask around to find a true elder. There are a lot of good guys, but there are a lot of spiritual elites whose feet no longer touch the ground when they walk. You can feel it when they talk—they are not connected to spirit.*

The disconnection from spirit has been learned over time to where it is embedded in the consciousness, often found in western ideologies. The process of spiritual fragmentation is observed in “Spiritual Elites” who have forgotten about their own humility.

*Western cultures have a sense of entitlement to everything. We see it in science and in political systems. Scientific testing is done to the n<sup>th</sup> degree—answers about universal mysteries are forced. Whites are like spoiled children who haven't grown up yet; they are always looking for something and don't know when to stop. Native people stop because we know we are not allowed to continue. We have been overrun for so long; sometimes the Whites come into the sweat lodge with an attitude of wanting to take-over our ceremonies. I've seen it so many times in my sweats that I've now starting closing my door to White people. I'm withdrawing from running cross-cultural sweats. It's been too hard.<sup>37</sup>*

*The sweat lodge will be here long after the foolish people have gone. There is a religious revolution going on and the White man is looking for a definition. I say that we all have it; it's right there. The White people have it too, they have dreams, but because the Church told them long ago that only the Church had dreams, they became disconnected from their own spiritual answers. Now the White people are starting to realize that there are meanings to dreams. So they are looking to the Native leaders for guidance.*

There is a sense of fatigue and frustration among many Native elders on account of overlapping worldviews where Western ways of knowing are being forced onto Native spiritual cosmologies. In all fairness, this elder also stated in the interview, that it is not only Whites that misappropriate the sacred and violate protocols, but Native people are doing this as well. What is at hand is a collapse of Western into Native worldviews.

At this point, I wish to remind readers that italicized sections are the words of the respondents' and not mine. I use footnotes to clarify what an elder has meant.

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<sup>37</sup> This comment is in reference to Story 3: "Good and bad spirits" in chapter 5, *The Principle of Spirit Piracy* where the New Age woman attended the sweat lodge ceremony. There is a belief among Native elders that an elder's life is shortened when he or she has to deal with difficult situations such as bringing peace among angered spirits. It is this elder's experience that White people often demand explanations for everything and take longer to accept Native cosmologies of spirituality. "White" refers to a colonial mindset and not skin colour.



## 6.6 Northern Lights Boy (*Nakota/Stoney*)

The next interview held with elder Northern Lights Boy (Nakota/Stoney) focused on the problematic social phenomenon occurring around Native sweat lodges today—the effects of modernity conflicting with traditional ceremonial ways. His knowledge and experience of working with benevolent and malevolent spirits is included in this interview; something not frequently addressed in Native literature today.

Northern Lights Boy has participated in and led traditional sweat lodge ceremonies for the past forty years. His teachings come from Nakota elders, the Creator, and from the spirit world. He lives on the Stoney Reserve and occasionally travels to city centres to lead lodges. Themes that arose in this interview focused on protocols, processes, and the human and spiritual consequences of violating natural laws. He believes that people are abusing the sweat lodge today because modernity has altered traditional ways of spiritual practice.

Protocols are part of the ceremonial process that range from how the fire is prepared, to how the water is splashed on the rocks, and how people conduct themselves inside and outside the lodge.

*When you cut that wood, you gotta ask that wood to forgive you because you are using him to clean yourself, to heal yourself. Before you pick that rock, you put tobacco out. Every one of these things that you do for the sweat lodge, you gotta put tobacco out. Picking wood, rocks, and before you make that fire, you put tobacco out. So little things like that are forgotten today.*

*The sweat lodge the way I do it, I speak to the people first while the door is open. I make each one of them talk. Why they are here so that everybody will hear, then everyone will remember what to pray about for one another. So when we're sitting inside the sweat lodge, we're humble. We're all there to pray—for ourselves, for the people we love, for the people we travel with, for the people that are sick in hospital, people who are struggling. We pray for all of them.*

*When all rocks are in, we give splashes to the Creator first, then splashes for the pipe, the rattle, the tobacco, the water, the willow, and the fire—seven things to give up first. We splash four times through for each one of them. When you're done, then your songs come. Before you sing your songs, you splash four times for the spiritual beings that are out there. You splash four for the old man that sits in the east, south, the west, and the north and then you splash for Mother Earth.*

*Even loading up a pipe, before you put the stem and the pipe bowl together, you have to sing for the stem and for the stone (pipe bowl). When you put it together, you sing for the tobacco. You'll know when you smoke the pipe—the one that will have the spirit will stay lit. Today, people just put the pipe together, put tobacco in it, and bring it in the sweat lodge. No, that's not how it works. When you're done, you sing for the rattle. These things, people today don't know.*

The responsibility of teaching about protocols in and around the sweat lodge, Northern

Lights Boy said:

*It's for the people to understand before they get in there. They're supposed to ask: How shall we sit? Where do you want us to sit? How do you want us to conduct ourselves when we sit inside your sacred circle? How shall we speak? Do we speak out loud to everyone or do we speak inside our own prayers? It's the people that are supposed to ask our traditional ceremonialists and lodge keepers. If the people want to come in, they're supposed to ask. Sometimes when we sit in there and if people don't ask their questions, they get confused.*

When I asked, “how does the sweat lodge teach us about natural laws?” Northern Lights

Boy replied by saying this:

*It is in oneself. Everybody has a job to do on Mother Earth. You have to listen from your heart. The greatest gift of Native spirituality is when you face yourself. That's the challenge. People say Native spirituality is black magic; it's not. It's the natural laws that the Creator upon Mother Earth for Native people to use, but not to abuse. The non-Natives have to realize when they want to know something; they have to realize that they are putting a lot of things on that medicine man or that pipe holder. For me to give you information, I will go through lots. A lot of things that I'm gonna go through just for the information you want. Every sweat lodge I go to, I'll be whipped—that's the payment that I'll go through. These things are the ones people don't understand. When we pray for people we shorten our lives, as we give part of our lives to them. Their sickness we take it into our body, so that's the big difference.*

*Sometimes lodge leaders call me a medicine man; it puts me in danger when people do that. Don't call me medicine man. Don't call me powerful people. No, I'm not powerful. I don't want to be above the Creator. Don't put me above the Creator. When you call a person a medicine man, that's what you're doing. In time, you're going to make the Creator challenge that medicine man.*

Northern Lights Boy argues that the sweat lodge has transitioned over time to where modernity has altered traditional spiritual practices.

*The sweat lodge has changed in society today. It is supposed to be used to purify ourselves. As a person who carries a pipe, I attend sweat lodges to help people. I look at how many people are in there and I pray for each one of them. When I'm done with that, I will bless their families, all the First Nations peoples, and all these people of different races. Then I pray for myself. I keep myself last and sometimes I forget to pray for myself. The protocols of these sweat lodges is to heal, to heal ourselves, to get out our things, to clean people up from in and out.*

*But as a pipe holder I get scared. I'm not kidding you. I get scared. I'm not scared of the sweat lodge—I'm scared of the people and what they do. When people are doing things inside the lodge that they shouldn't be doing, I let them know. When people do things they shouldn't be doing, the spirits go after the medicine men running the lodge. There are consequences to violating natural laws—we pay the consequences as pipe holders, sometimes not directly, sometimes it will affect our family.*

*The thing that really concerns me sweating with non-Natives, I want to let you know, with our Native women when they come in the sweat lodge, they sit in a certain way. With non-Natives, when they come in, White ladies, they don't sit properly and that's a little bit disturbing to us in the Native community. When a lady respects herself, she'll sit in a certain way. These days, women are not supposed to sit like this with their legs (shows cross-legged with knees apart). When they do that that means they're open and sometimes we as medicine people and pipe carriers we face the consequences. We get tired. They put a lot on us. That's where most medicine men lose themselves. When non-Natives come in like that and cross their legs and sit like that, there are some men that lose themselves and then they go after these women. So when you come in and sit inside a sweat lodge, you're there to humble yourself, it's not for that purpose. When you're sitting inside the sweat lodge, that's mother womb that we're in sitting in, we're brothers and sisters in there.*

*The Nakota people they are kind hearted and they tend to teach other people, other races. Some of these teachings they've branched out to different tribes. Expand on these teachings, but don't abuse them. You have ceremony because you think of your families. If there's something bothering you in your home, you*

*do little ceremonies to keep your family intact. These things are things people need to know. That's the traditional way. Over the past twenty years it's changed, now it's the modern way.*

Northern Lights Boy cautions people who jump from one sweat to another saying that this creates spiritual confusion within a person and can be dangerous as the spirits around different medicine people will begin to clash with one another.

*You know when people don't believe in themselves, they'll go to one medicine man and jump to another one and then another one—the more they keep going, the spiritual beings of those medicine men will clash—they challenge each other. So the Nakota elders always said if you don't want to face those consequences stick with one medicine man, until he advises you to go to another one.*

*Individual medicine man, the way they use their medicine is different. They're not all the same. They're different in how they use their medicine. You do not jump around. That's the other thing, why you see the things you see.<sup>38</sup>*

*I know that there are Native people around the city who do these sweat lodges without anybody's knowledge, who don't have the right (to lead lodge), and yet they do it. And then they try to sell our traditional ways to the non-Native. They try to teach them in workshops. We know that. The true medicine people when they find these things out, they stop it. These people are playing around with the spirit world and when bad medicine comes around, it's a hundred times harsher.*

Malevolent spirits are not frequently talked about in Native literature today. However, Northern Lights Boy is gifted in knowing how to work with the benevolent spirits of the light side and the malevolent spirits of the dark. In his experience, human beings create struggles between spirits.

*Sometimes there is competition between sweat lodge keepers where out of jealousy "bad medicine"<sup>39</sup> is sent to another lodge keeper. When other pipe holders know that a person can do that, the sweat lodge keepers are challenged.*

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<sup>38</sup> Northern Lights Boy is referring to the effects that participants' behaviours can have on the spirit world. This can manifest itself in the form of feeling negative tensions from the spirits within the lodge or when the spirits shook the willows out of anger (see Story 3 on "Good and bad spirits" in chapter 5).

<sup>39</sup> The term "bad/evil medicine" refers to curses and negative spiritual affliction placed on someone by another person to bind them spiritually. The use of bad medicine, curses, and love medicine is written about in historical literature, but remains an illusive science kept protected within closed societies. There is great danger in practicing bad medicine, thus Native elders are often uncomfortable speaking on this topic. See H.C. Wolfart (2000:120-139) and Young et al. (1989:40-55) on good and bad/evil medicine.

*From wherever these sweat lodge keepers (medicine people) are, they will try to do something to other lodge keepers through spirituality using the sweat lodge. You have to watch out. There'll be a lot of fake medicine men, the wannabes that will come. They will say a lot of good things, but they will talk bad about others to make themselves look better. There is a lot of spiritual jealousy between lodge leaders.*

*Struggles also happen in lodges among pipe carriers, which are reflected in the spirit of the pipes.*

*Only if it's a medicine lodge, then all the pipes will come in. If it's a general sweat like the one we have, only one pipe will come in the lodge. It all depends on the pipe carrier too. Let's say in a sweat lodge, there are twelve pipe holders. If he's leading the sweat lodge, he's going to choose who's going to sing. If he takes every second person to make it four or to make it six or seven songs, how about the rest, they're going to be upset because they never sang in there. So when that happens, then the spirits fight. You may have experienced when a person puts you down and you do nothing, but if the spirits get angry, they will retaliate. Your own spirit will keep an eye on you even if you don't provoke anybody, even though you don't challenge or take revenge on the spirits. If revenge is not on your mind, the spirits will set up to protect you, it's their duty.*

The world of spirits is complex. To understand this complexity requires years of training under the guidance of experienced elders. Even though a person may not fully understand the world of spirits, participants can feel the effects of spiritual conflict within sweat lodges. This is illustrated in the third story in Chapter 5 titled, "*Consequences to Violating Protocols and Natural Law.*"

According to Northern Lights Boy, as more people seek healing and spiritual answers in sweat lodge ceremonies, problems arise as modernity conflicts with traditional belief systems. Northern Lights Boy tells us a story about rocks that demonstrate how values systems have changed to where capitalism has replaced the sacredness of the natural world.

*Again my experience with spirituality, sweat lodges, and Sun Dances is that it's the people themselves that are destroying it. They want to gain more power than*

*anybody else so that other people will recognize them and they will make money out of it. The true ones stay down here, they stay out of it.*

*There's a long story in the back that elders used to say—there are too many spiritual healers, too many pipe carriers, and too many ceremonial people that all of a sudden, I don't know where they came out, they said. When that time happened, the Creator took Mother Earth back and flooded it. All these men that thought they had that power were turned into rock. Now today people pick these rocks because they are all different colours, they are shiny and sparkly. The ego that these individual had because they wanted to be popular, turned them into rock, and for what? Today when people find all these rocks, they sell them ... all these different rocks ... so where did it start? It had to start way back then, but nobody ever seen them ... see what was going on ... even today when you go to ceremony when there's all these people together, when there's a Sundance happening they'll give this rattle to this medicine man and he'll come and sing ... now these guys that are supposed to help this man, but if they think the power's not there, they'll get up and walk. The medicine man's basically alone, but what these people don't know is that he's the one who knows about sacred powers.*

### **6.7 Dr. Terry Willard (*non-Native*)**

Next is an interview with a non-Native man. Although not a lodge leader himself, Dr. Terry Willard has participated in Native sweat lodge ceremonies for the past thirty years. He also rents part of his land to two groups who conduct lodge ceremonies: Métis leads one group, while a New Age group leads the other. Willard does not believe that Spirit Piracy is taking place in sweat lodges; rather, he believes that any attempt to gain in spiritual knowledge is good whether protocols are adhered to or not. I have included this interview to provide the reader with an alternative perspective, one that includes a non-Native approach to Native spiritual practices. I also contacted three different non-Native women that lead New Age sweat lodges to gain an even broader perspective, but none of them would agree to meet with me.

Dr. Terry Willard is an herbalist and the director of the Wild Rose College of Natural Healing in Calgary. He is a non-Native, fifth generation Albertan. Willard has

participated in sweat lodge ceremonies since the late 1970's. His approach to Native spirituality, particularly sweat lodge ceremonies is that anyone who has an interest in them is attempting to move him or herself spiritually forward. Thus, he does not support the concept of Spirit Piracy.

*I do think that spirituality is in the individual, not in the cathedral—it's in the way you see it, and in the way you feel it. It's not the sweat lodge itself. It's your relationship with the rocks. Because you have a relationship with the rocks doesn't mean that the other person has to have the same relationship. It's being able to make yourself develop and the people in your lodge to be able to set parameters. Sometimes these lodges are public lodges and sometimes they are private lodges—they all work in different ways meaning. The spiritual aspect is profoundly personal. No matter what, individuals go through different levels of teachings.*

*You can have a person in any subject ... let's say a book ... and the person who's been initiated in that material will be at one level of understanding of the material they've read and then another person who hasn't read the material is going to have another level of understanding. So you get a New Ager or a European person who wants to have "an Indian experience." They go into a sweat lodge and they're not going to understand the depth of it, therefore they might not respect it. But the reason they are there in the first place is in part because of the beauty, but also because they are seeing something that has sacred depth. So anytime we can touch a person at a sacred depth is good.*

*The profoundness of the sacredness is in the individual and you might have five people in a sweat lodge having a deep and profound spiritual relationship with the rocks, the water, the songs, and the ceremony. The leader of that sweat lodge has the right to tell a person that they are inappropriate if they are being inappropriate, but even giving them a little glimpse of the sacred helps move them along.*

*I think all these spiritual things are profoundly personal, sometimes psychological, sometimes spiritual, and sometimes mental. I'm separating these three things out, so each person like in the medicine wheel has to see it from their point of view. They have to work through that point of view to be able to work their way through it to get to a new position. So again you can't change a quest, so there's going to be several quests, just like you can't say a person shouldn't be able to sell a bible, or sell a cross, or any other religious artifact. Throughout history, religion and spirituality have crossed over—sometimes it is slow, sometimes it's not slow. If a person comes into a sweat lodge and offers tobacco, is that not buying the stuff? It is to some people and it isn't for others. Some*

*people think tobacco is a commodity and some think it's an offering. So it's in the mind of the beholder and the intent of it.*

*To create proper boundaries doesn't mean that there's not going to be other people that are not going to do a whole bunch of drugs and go out and have a sweat out of it. They are making it into the shape of a sweat lodge and it's no different than a sauna for them. They're doing it to get laid. There's gonna be people like that, for sure, that's human.*

*I do not in any way shape or form feel that people are selling out or having spiritual piracy,<sup>40</sup> in fact people are searching, they're hungry for spirituality and even if they only get a little crumb of this big spiritual thing, when they go into the sweat lodge that's good, because next time, they might be able to get more out of it.*

Willard rents space on his country property to two different groups of people who lead sweat lodges. Métis elders lead one lodge following Lakota Sundance teachings, while the other lodge is put on by people who teach courses at the college—this lodge is lead by a woman with 35 years of training in shamanic teachings.<sup>41</sup>

*People whom I would consider Métis elders, created one. They've all got a certain amount of Native blood in them, but they're Métis. I would have to say that the sweat lodge led by Métis elders is much more serious. They're all Sun Dancers. Most of them have gotten to the fourth level of Sundance (completed the commitment to dance every year for four consecutive years). So they're serious about it. It has taken years upon years of learning to get to where they are. So the way they're doing, it is definitely sacred. The way they treat the grandfather rocks, the water, and the way they sing the songs while they're in the sweat lodge. The process is somewhat of a recipe, but it's an actual process they go through for the four rounds. The number of rocks, the number of willows used, and so on, is part of the process. I don't think it's the actual rocks that help gain entry point into the spirit world; I think it's the actual ceremony and the intent around it.*

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<sup>40</sup> See notes at end of interview on how I differentiate between “spiritual” and “spirit” piracy.

<sup>41</sup> Shamanic teachings are derived from shamanism where there are many variations throughout the world. Hultrantz (1985:512) states the term “shaman” originates from the Tungus of Siberia—a Tungusic word “that stands for a social functionary who, with the help of guardian spirits, attains ecstasy in order to create a rapport with the supernatural world on behalf of his group members.” Michael Harner was highly criticized for taking various parts of indigenous religions out of context to form neoshamanic (New Age) religions. Harner wrote *The Way of the Shaman* (1982) and founded the Foundation for Shamanic Studies in 1987.



*The other sweat lodge we have is a teaching lodge. It is much bigger and can fit 25 people in there. It is for lack of better words, "a sweat lodge with training wheels." It is a group of people who have rented space from me to put on courses through the college. They are mostly New Age people who are appropriating it, but I don't consider that spiritual piracy. It is lead by a woman with 35 years training in shamanism. It's almost only women in there and once in a while, when they have public sweats, men attend.*

*The sweat lodge is configured differently on purpose, meaning that the actual hole is not in the middle of the sweat lodge—it's near the door. So it is different. I've never been in that sweat lodge. I don't feel that I want to go in that sweat lodge—it's not the kind of sweat that I feel. The other one, I go into whenever I have the chance, it's a sweat that I feel. But that's because of where I am in my process and the way I feel connected to the land and the land that I am a custodian to.*

*But both of the lodges have appropriate situations. It gives people who live their everyday mundane life, three or four days a month, a place to go who crave a spiritual outlet. For people working for an oil field company, as a clerk, or an accountant or whatever, it's a spiritual outlet. For some reason the churches aren't doing it for them, therefore these people are finding the sweat lodge as a way for them.*

*I think that the profoundness of that energy that you talk about is in the process of coming back and it's seductive to some people. Some people still have a kind of a party thing going on, which is problematic especially when a person is taking the sweat lodge very seriously. But let's face it; saunas have been around in Europe for a long time. What's a Temazcal in Mexico, but a sweat; what is an Omgon in Mongolia, but a sweat; the Finnish have sweats, the Scandinavians have sweats; they just have them in different configurations. Sometimes there's the sacred involved in them, and sometimes the sacred is not involved in them. I think it's up to the leader of each lodge to set the tone and they might have three or more tones in the lodge because some people will be at different levels of initiation.*

*I would much rather have a group of people doing sweat lodges to learn about that level of sacredness than digging oil out of the tar sands. At least they are learning something about respecting the planet. At least they're learning that there is a sacred world. For me, any attempt at being present with the sacred is to be blessed.*

*Because we need more people to lead sweat lodges even if somebody's attempts at the beginning are floundering mistakes, the good news is, if you do it wrong, I don't agree that it can have a negative end. Usually the people that are doing this don't have enough power to call in negative things. It really comes down to the power of the people that are calling in the spirit and at what level they can*

*call them in. They (the beginners) can't open up portholes big enough to call-in negative spirits. They are incapable.*

*I agree that if someone found out about a lodge and started selling that information, there would be a problem there, that's an inappropriate use of it. Then I think inappropriate things can happen to that individual in the lodge.*

Moving now to another theme of this interview was Willard's belief in past lives.

Willard attributes his belief in having been a Native person in a past life to reincarnation.

*I believe in reincarnation and don't think time is linear. I know or feel that in many of my other lifetimes; I have been a First Nations person both in this part of the world and in many other parts of the world.*

On this note, I asked if his belief entitled him to certain privileges or access to Native knowledge of spiritual practices. This is how Willard responded:

*No, it doesn't entitle me to certain privileges. It does give me certain higher levels of responsibility, rather than privileges. Because I come with a grid of understanding that I could make mistakes and have the wrong things happen, and probably have in my life, then I can go back and resurrect them and change those around. So responsibility is probably the most important aspect of privilege. It's more important than the right to be able to do something. Responsibility is to do it right.*

*I think in the long run the answer is if people can communicate with the land, let's face it, there are a lot of people that don't feel spirit at all and they're not going to communicate with the land. We have five hundred years of history to prove that in North America. But the point here is if the person can touch the spirit of the land, the spirit of the land here talks to me deeply. Partly because I've got five generations before me here I would think, and partly maybe because I'm a herbalist and I like that realm and I study with that, I work with that realm.*

This led to a brief discussion on how plants teach Willard about natural laws.

*Well, I'm lucky enough that plants speak to me. I can sit with plants and feel things. I get information from them, as they share things ... so that's happened to me over my life and I would say it is one of those voices that I'm calling (for lack of better words) Gaia. Plants are just one of those forces. There are many other forces. For example, I have people who work with me and rocks really communicate with them strongly. Rocks don't speak to me at all—I don't hear anything. I can hope and feel things, but I don't get much communication from them. Spirit moves you at those times. So it's not like I actually hear a voice. I*

*hear a feeling and all of a sudden, there's a whole story inside my head ... or pieces of it ... so sometimes, I have to put the plant aside to get the rest of the information at a later time.*

Summarizing this interview, Willard believes that any form of spirituality is good because it moves a person forward. He does not believe that “spiritual piracy”<sup>42</sup> is possible. Willard does however believe that people who do not know the depth and complexities of ceremonies may appropriate Native spiritual practices. He agrees that selling sacred knowledge obtained in lodges does bear consequences—however, he did not specify what those consequences were.

Willard has observed an increase in people searching for spirituality in their lives saying that it is a growing phenomenon. The issue of past lives is contentious in Native cultures, as it is seen as another gateway for appropriating Native spirituality. Reincarnation is possible in Native belief systems as observed in the Naskapi culture or in Inuit cosmologies. However, when a non-Native person makes this claim, it can easily be used as an excuse to misappropriate sacred ceremonies through a sense of entitlement.

It is interesting that Willard has not attended the New Age sweat lodge on his country property, as he “feels nothing there.” During the interview, Willard did say that, “it is interesting what nature has done to that lodge.” I learned from an anonymous source that that particular lodge was blown down and destroyed by nature on a couple of

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<sup>42</sup> Even though I specifically used the term “Spirit Piracy,” like many others, Willard heard the term “spiritual piracy.” As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I make a clear distinction between the two terms. Spirit Piracy refers to the misappropriation, taking, wounding, and pirating of the individual spirit within people, places, and things. The energy that runs through all creation is spiritual—and is the same energy that runs through the spirituality of the universe—therefore, this is a spiritual matter—however, the distinction I make is that I refer to an individual Spirit as being pirated.

occasions, whereas the lodge led by the Métis group remained untouched even though both are built in the same natural environment.

### **6.8 Rick Lightning (*Ermineskin Cree*)**

This final interview with Grandfather Rick Lightning (*Ermineskin Cree*) concludes the data collection series. Several stories are told in this interview that demonstrate the interaction between humans and the spirit world and spiritual events that occur during sweat lodge ceremonies. Some stories include how Lightning received his soul<sup>43</sup> name, the movement of people and things through space and time, and when Lightning witnessed a grandfather come out of the rocks.

Rick Lightning is Cree from the Ermineskin Reserve in Hobbema, Alberta.<sup>44</sup> He is 55 years old, a father, grandfather, and great grandfather. Although raised by his grandfather Albert Lightning, Rick refers to him as *nohtâwiy*<sup>45</sup> (father or dad). In the Cree tradition, when grandparents raise a grandchild, this relationship is considered very special as the grandparents transfer acquired wisdom to the child. Albert Lightning was a respected traditionalist, a healer, and a spiritual mentor to Rick. Lightning remembers waking up to the smell of burning sweetgrass, being wrapped in a blanket and taken outside in his *nohtâwiy*'s arms to watch the sunrise, and listen to prayers and songs.

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<sup>43</sup> Lightning's use of the term "soul" name is comparable to "Indian or Spirit" name.

<sup>44</sup> Throughout this interview, when I use the surname Lightning, I make reference to Rick rather than his grandfather Albert Lightning.

<sup>45</sup> All spelling of Cree words and translations in Rick Lightning's interview are taken from: Nancy LeClaire, and George Cardinal. *Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary: alperta ohci kehtehayak nehiyaw otwestamâkewasinahikan*. (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press & Duval House Publishing, 1998), 304.

Storytelling is used as a research methodology to transfer knowledge of the sacred/spirit world to readers. Some of the areas of discussion include protocols around the sweat lodge, concerns over how the traditional lodge has transitioned, and human interactions with the spirit world. Numerous stories are told to convey the message of how powerful the spirit world is and that our behaviours directly impact the physical and spirit world.

All stories told are from Lightning's experiences within the sweat lodge ceremony, as well as other spiritual experiences he believes are important to share. Those unfamiliar with how the spirit world communicates with humans, may find these stories difficult to believe, but they are however real and demonstrate how the spirit world continuously interacts with the physical realm.

Developing and establishing relationships particularly between researchers and members of Aboriginal communities, takes time. This is important to understand that historically, the relationship between research and Aboriginal peoples was misconstrued and taken out of context to serve the needs of the researcher (Smith 1999:2). My search for "how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people" began in the fall of 2007, when I offered tobacco to a fellow sweat-lodger. I asked her if she would lead me to a Cree elder who might know of this story. The tobacco eventually made its way to Rick Lightning. At a memorial service held on September 28, 2008 in Bragg Creek, Alberta, I prayed to the spirit of the deceased asking him to guide me to a reputable Cree elder knowledgeable in traditional ways of ceremony. That evening, I received a call from Rick.

My relationship with Lightning and his family took several months to develop. It began with three phone calls over a four-month period. Our first in-person meeting took place in mid-December 2008, where we discussed my research in greater detail. We started off with a smudge and talked in the adjoining building to his sweat lodge. As I talked and held the tobacco in my hands, I prayed and described what the tobacco was for. This is part of the protocol process. Before Lightning accepts tobacco from anyone, he first asks, “What is it for?” He may not accept it depending on the request. Lightning explained that, “When a person makes a commitment with tobacco, I ask first what it is for. I won’t just take the tobacco. I need to know what it is for, and then I will let you know if I can help you.” He stated that when a person offers tobacco for a sweat (even if it is a week before) or for help of any kind, this is when the ceremony begins. Lightning accepted my tobacco offering, which signalled the beginning of our journey with this research.

I met the Lightning family at their son’s 16th birthday party to see how a person relates to his or her family. It was important to Lightning for me to see him in his natural family environment. Two weeks later, we arranged for another visit to conduct the actual interview. Lightning said, “I just needed you to see these things first. I could have told you the whole story over the phone, but I wanted us to meet first” ... “The problem today is that everybody wants an instant recipe for instant spirituality.” How could I as a researcher convey Lightning’s knowledge if I didn’t understand him? Building relationships between researchers and those from whom we seek knowledge happens over time—trust, transparency, and reliability are fundamental values.

Lightning started by telling me that this research is very important. He also cautioned me that some people would find my work controversial, as I will be cautioning people to be aware of those who violate sacred ceremonies.

*There will be people who will be angered by your work, but they should be thanking you instead. They will be angry because you are exposing them. Violators want people to remain ignorant so that they can keep doing what they're doing to create an illusion. These people are Born-Again Elders/Indians who do not understand the deep meaning of spirituality. They are the ones who are misappropriating our spiritual ways, our traditions, and our ceremonies for profit or self-interest. The work you are doing is very important, which is why I am supporting you. Our ceremonies are sacred, but the process of fragmentation has caused our people to lose their cultural and spiritual way.*

Lightning has been around sweat lodges since the age of five. At an early age Lightning helped with the sweat lodge ceremony by collecting wood and woodchips. As he got older and matured, he learned more sacred things relating to the sweat lodge such as the pipe and specific protocols. Today, he leads sweat lodges, is active in tribal and community work, and is often called upon to speak at public conferences.

Lightning's willingness to participate in this research was twofold—to share his knowledge with others and to address the disturbing social phenomenon that he also is witnessing. Identifying a problem is about healing and protecting what is sacred. The interview began with Lightning showing me an array of ceremonial items, medicines, his *nohtâwiy*'s pipe bag, ceremonial pipe, and gifting me with sage balls, bear root, and rat root. During this time, he told me the history of this pipe stating that,

*Every pipe has a spirit of its own. Every pipe has a reason and purpose. It is not one pipe fits all. There's a reason for every pipe. And that's something that's always important to understand. These pipes come for reasons and they have stories behind them.*

Each ceremonial item has a spirit within it. Therefore, it is important to know the history of ceremonial items, where they come from, and their purpose.

When Lightning was a boy his mentor taught him how to prepare the sweat lodge fire. When the participants asked, “Who was the fire-keeper?” Albert would say, “Rick made the fire, it’s going to be a hot one.” Lightning learned to make the stage (or the base of the structure) with green logs. This ensured that the rocks would remain hotter as the fire burned slower and longer. Working with the fire and the rocks requires years of training—this teaches a person to respect the spirit within fire and rocks.

*All things give up their lives for us—the willows, the rocks, and the medicines. When we pick rocks, we declare what we are doing. Declare what it’s for. I’m doing this for this reason. I need your help for this purpose. This is part of the protocol.*

*Once the rocks are burned, you can’t use them again unless they are fire/lava rocks because their spiritual power is exhausted. Fire or lava rocks are made for fire. Those you can reheat, but we don’t abuse them. We use them only for ceremony and for certain purposes. Rocks picked out of rivers are not good for sweat lodges because fire and water don’t mix. Water rocks will explode. So you have to know what you are doing.*

*We know that rocks have spirits. I’ve seen the grandfather come out of the rocks. When his head came out he looked like this (Lightning makes a motion of a long neck stretching out). He had long hair braided like this (shows long braids on either side of his head laying on the front of his chest). This part was cropped on top and combed over like this (shows top of head where hair was standing up and combed to the right side). He looked like he was bobbing in and out of water. He went back into the rocks after he looked around inside the sweat lodge. When he ducked back into the rocks, the heat got really hot. The heat blessed us because it was of love. The heat didn’t burn anybody—it was healing. It was a heat that cleanses. It was unbelievable. I’ve seen that grandfather twice now. When that happened, I was singing my song and I just about forgot what I was singing. I was so amazed. People were asking, “How come you’re amazed?” I said, “I’m just as amazed as you guys. I’m in this journey with you. I’m human too.” The spirit that came out of the rock was a grandfather spirit. The heat he exudes was one of love—this was one way that the sweat lodge teaches us about natural laws and the powers of the spirit world.*



In Lightning's sweat, basic rules/protocols are:

*No drinking or drugs for a period of four days before the sweat, nothing that has polluted the body.*

*All participants are aware that they should abstain from sex prior to the ceremony.*

*Participants are to leave their minds outside and come into the lodge with open hearts. An active mind can create fear and anxiety not allowing a person to pray with their hearts.*

*Women are to wear dresses or skirts to cover their legs—it is not for the shame of the body, but to respect it, for a man to respect her. Women are to sit a certain way, with their legs together and to the side; men sit cross-legged. If you allow women to wear shorts in the sweat lodge, then you allow a breaking or fragmentation of cultural norms and traditions. Women “on their time” (menstrual cycle) do not enter the lodge. A woman on her time is cleansing herself mentally and physically—that's her spirit time—where she's at her strongest. This is not to exclude women, but to honour their spiritual powers.*

*Normally, I have the oldest beside me—from the oldest to the youngest, from the back of the lodge to the doorway. That's how I was brought up. I always have someone beside me that I respect and know is experienced in these ways. The sweat lodge has four rounds. As soon as the ceremony begins, an individual is a part of a greater universal spiritually. The experience of each round varies for individuals in terms of heat intensity. A person can call to have the door opened at any time—there is no judgment—it is not a competition. The first round is a bit hot. The second round is hotter. If you can get beyond that, you get to the third round where the heat intensifies because it is the healing round. The fourth round is the hottest where you feel the heat. As the rounds increase, a person feels the love of the sacred as they enter the spiritual realm. It's hard to get there. It's a tough place to be. The transition is not easy, but when you get there, it's worth it. Getting through a sweat is tough and that's the same as getting through life. Transition is not easy. We've just got to get beyond ourselves, beyond our mind to reach the spirit world.*

*The sweat lodge ceremony is only a part of the universal knowledge—it is an entrance to another dimension, if people will believe that. People will want to understand, but they will have difficulty in doing so because it deals with the intangible, the spirit world.*

Protocols follow complex understandings of the spirit world and its interaction with the physical world. This is often observed through unexplainable spiritual

anomalies. Lightning relays a story about a rattle that was left behind by another elder in his grandfather's sweat lodge. Albert told his friend that he would send back his rattle.

*Our people knew about time and space. There were able to use time and space to send things in or travel by. One time an old man forgot his rattle in my nohtâwiy's sweat lodge. Buffalo Child (Albert Lightning) phoned him and said, "I will send it to you." The old man thought he was going to send it by mail or something. That night when the old man's son was cleaning their sweat lodge in preparation for their sweat the next day, he found his father's rattle sitting on the altar. Buffalo Child called the old man and said, "Ah, you got your rattle eh. Was its paw bloody from running so fast?" The old man was amazed that Buffalo Child had the power to do that.*

Stories of shortening time or sending things through time and space were more common in the past according to Lightning.

*The old people had figured it out. They knew how to transport themselves and to transport stuff. How they did it, I don't know. But I know it's real.*

Lightning also has had experiences of shortening travel time where instead of completing a nine-hour drive, the time was shortened to four hours, not through speeding, but by using spirit/space time to travel on. He could not explain how this happened, as he is not able to will it on his own accord—this is what I refer to as the application of quantum physics. Lightning stated that Buffalo Child had reached the point of willing these spiritual events to happen.

Likewise, to enter the realm of the sweat lodge ceremony is to enter another dimension, that of the spirit world. What transpires here is a spiritual mystery. In a story on how Lightning got his spirit name, he tells us how the polar bear kept appearing in his life.

*I didn't have my Cree name for a long time. One day, this old Cree man called me from up north. He called me and asked me to go visit him. But during that time my family and I were driving back from Ontario. While we were in Swift Current my muffler broke and carbon monoxide was coming into the van, the kids*

were getting sick. We had to wait until morning before it could be fixed so we stayed in a motel room. My son came running to us and said, "Mom, dad, there's a white bear in that room." I asked him, "What kind of white bear?" He said, "The bear was just sitting there in our room." So I walked in there and he pointed and said, "He was right there!" I said, "I believe you son." Then when we got home, the kids said, "Dad, that white bear, he's in the living room now. We saw it." I said, "Yeah, well he must be happy we're home." So the white bear kept coming into my life.

When we went up north to Isle La Crosse, I was in the van with a bunch of guys and one of them said, "Rick." I said, "What?" He said, "You might think I'm nuts but there's a polar bear running beside the van." Then he asked, "How fast are we going?" I said, "Oh, about 110 kilometres an hour." That bear was just jogging along the van. "That bear's been following us for a long time, I didn't want to say anything. He'd been running beside us in the ditch," my friend said. So when we got to Isle La Crosse, that old man was waiting for us.

He and his wife are very spiritual people. They are old, late 80's. He's a very old friend of my father's. Their sweat is set up a little different than ours. His sweat is big, but not huge like some of these sky-dome sweats we see in large cities. People come from all over, even the Northwest Territories, to see him. That sweat lodge was packed. He said, "Bring your pipe in Rick and hold onto it." I thought, oh, oh, what does that mean? "It gets a little rough sometimes, so try to stay here in the moment," the old man said.

It felt like I was bouncing all around in the sweat. I was praying hard when a bear came in front of me and breathed this hot air into my face. It was a polar bear. I thought to myself, how did this old man get this polar bear in here? As I was holding onto my pipe, this bear said to me, "Grandson, I have come to claim you for my family." He told me, "White bear, my fellow, my family, that is your name." He came to give me my name. Like if your name and my name is Fred, we have the same name—we are of the same family. So he told me that we shared the same name. That's how that works.

So the bear told me he's been with me for a while, so he came to claim me for his family. And that's my name, he'd always been with me, so that's the polar bear, the healing bear. That's whom my family is I guess you can say. The spirit person that I work with is the polar bear. So that's how my name came to be wapahmaskwa.

When the door of the sweat lodge opened, I asked my friend, "Did I bounce off you, I'm sorry about that?" He said, "No, why? It's like you weren't even here." Yet, I felt that I'd been bouncing around everywhere...we were packed in that sweat, yet I didn't hit anybody. When the door opened we were all back together.

*So in the sweat you can go into another dimension, another area, another level if you believe in that. It can happen. There are many things in the sweat that happen, which people don't believe or have a hard time comprehending.*

This led the interview into an area of discussion around misappropriation of the sacred and consequences to violating natural laws. Lightning states that, “those who play with spirits wind up having to pay.”

Let's take a moment to revisit the past. Two pivotal events mark the rupture of Native transmission of cultural knowledge from the early to mid-1900's: first, the ban on sweat lodges by the Canadian government, and secondly, the forced removal of Native children from their homes during the residential school era. Lightning states that, “this resulted in a culture of “Born Again Elders/Indians” who wanted to reclaim their Native heritage and cultural identities, but had little to no training in leading spiritual ceremonies.”

Coinciding with the era of “Born Again Elders” was a renewed interest in Native spirituality by Whites. The 1980's New Age movement saw the rise of White Shamans and fake medicine men and women—a culture of commercializing Native American spiritual traditions. Today, there is a continuation of fake leaders both Native and non-Native who claim to have spiritual powers. Rather, these folks have created cultural confusion through mixing and matching various religious traditions such as Buddhism, Wicca, Sioux, Cree, and Blackfoot ceremonies. Lightning warns that playing with spirits and ancient traditional ceremonies results in someone having to pay the consequences.

There are spiritual consequences that can affect either the person who is playing with the powers of the spirit world or to his or her family members. Consequences often come in the form of sickness, loss of spiritual gifts (such as seeing the spirit world), or

continuous misfortune. Such consequences can linger and be passed onto subsequent generations—such as is observed in a story about a ‘Walking Spirit Wandering.’

*There was this old man who claimed to be a healer. During his sweat lodges he would say things like, “Oh the spirits are here! They have come!” This often frightened the participants and made them believe that he was a very powerful, spiritual leader. While the door was closed and he began to pour the water on the rocks, something started to flap around inside the lodge. He said, “Quick open the door!” Well he was the first one to bolt out of the lodge leaving the others behind. It turned out that a chicken had come into the lodge the night before to keep warm. No one had noticed him in the lodge. So when the leader started pouring water on the rocks, the chicken woke up and started flapping around. The participants then realized that this leader was a phoney and lost their confidence in him. A true leader would not have been scared off and more than likely would have known it was a chicken.*

*Born Again Elders/Indians are those who went through residential schools and did not learn their culture—they are making it up as they go and many of them have learned that they can make money from this. So there is a two level thing happening here—there are the real grandfathers and the Born-Again. Some people buy into this, while others don’t. Born-Again Elders are predators. They are now conducting sweat lodges and do wrong things such as sexual assaults on vulnerable people. I hear about this. I’ve dealt with people who have been assaulted this way. God doesn’t have to feel women’s breasts in there. God doesn’t feel between their legs when they’re in there. That’s not God! That’s not spirit. Yet these people get away with it because people are looking for healing—they are so innocent and unsuspecting. Many leaders are getting away with this because they are not being called on their inappropriate behaviours.*

*I was at a conference one time and spoke about this. I said, “There are Born-Again Elders who are hurting our people. They are sexually abusing our people. Well I’ll tell you, there were some elders that were really angry with me for saying that. I asked them, “What are you angry about? Are you one of them?” It was like I physically hit them between the eyes and it went boom. “Don’t come near me like that, you should be thanking me because some of your people are getting hurt.”*

*Many of these Born Again Indians have taken what they’ve seen and are going through the motions—they’ve got the rattles, they’ve got the water, and they’re playing with the ceremony—they don’t realize what they’re doing. So what’s happening is that they are creating something that can go from now to where someone’s going to pay either in this lifetime or it will continue into next generations.*

*There is what I call, “Spirit Vampires,” in sweat lodges. For example, participants go into the lodge and when they come out they are exhausted. The old man who is leading the lodge is highly energized, while everyone else can hardly move. There are a lot of people doing this. I call them spirit vampires because they suck the energy out of you—they drain you emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. They do that. That’s the way it is. I find a lot of those things happening today. There are a lot of stories like that. Why I don’t know. They must be getting something out of it. We must be careful and protect ourselves against these violations.*

*My father once told me a story of meeting a woman who’d been walking since the beginning of time in eternal damnation. She was a ‘Walking Spirit Wandering.’ I wondered what she could have done that was that bad. My father told me that there are people who have done some pretty amazingly awful things to other people. The consequences can be extreme.*

Lightning did not entirely accept my term of ‘Spirit Piracy’ saying that a person cannot steal something that belongs to the Creator. “This energy belongs to a higher existence.” He did agree saying that, “the end result is that that person creating the violation will wind up facing consequences.”

*There are different kinds of sacrifice we do to receive spiritual gifts, either through fasting, Sun Dances, sweating, and give-aways.<sup>46</sup> When we want to receive songs or acquire spiritual knowledge, we fast for four days (or more) without food or water. We show our humility by sacrificing ourselves to the Creator.*

“People have been taking from the spirit world in the name of religion to serve their own purposes for a long time,” Lightning told me. The idea of “Spirit Piracy” is not new, but the approach I am taking provides a different angle to look at inappropriate human behaviour that is wounding the sacred energy/life source energy that lives in us all. There are many ways people are misappropriating the sacred now. This is due to the process I have mentioned, that of spiritual fragmentation.

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<sup>46</sup> A “give-away” is where a person gifts those in attendance at the end of a ceremony to thank them for their support. Gifts can range from household items, clothes, and hand-made items to name a few.

Fragmentation is a process whereby everything is dissected and broken down into smaller pieces—this is what is happening in the sweat lodge ceremony today. Lightning argues that, “Modern society has fragmented everything through rationalization.” This statement came as a response to my thoughts that there seemed to be two sets of protocols around the sweat lodge ceremony: first—where people pray directly to the spirit world, putting the spirit of the fire, water, rocks, wood, and medicines before the self; and the second—which are created by people as they go along. Lightning stated that there are no divisions or sets of protocols as this would serve only to create excuses to fragment the sacred.

*People who are taught to run sweats by their grandfathers are taught to pray in their own Native languages, not in English. A Cree sweat for example is done in the Cree language; if it is done in English, then it is not a Cree sweat. Cree songs do not have the same meaning if translated in English. Words have spirits. And it is the spirit contained in words that travel to the spirit world. The key to Native spirituality is found in the language.<sup>47</sup>*

Ancestors understand the meaning of the words in songs as they are tied to unique spiritual cosmologies. Cosmologies contain creation stories, sacred relationships between humans and the natural world, and knowledge about the sacred. This is why learning and maintaining Native languages in ceremonies such as a sweat lodge is important. Within language are nuances that are learned experientially as part of cultural

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<sup>47</sup> Note that all languages have spirit. An interesting teaching was given to me during a sweat lodge ceremony in May 2009, while I was asked to pour the first round. A spirit told me to pray in the same language I spoke when I was four-years-old. This was the French language. I was told that the child energy within me needed to be spoken to and given directions in French. To receive instruction in the Cree language would not have been understood by the little four-year-old girl. Thus, all languages have spirit and the capacity to heal. Thus, Lightning’s advocacy for the Cree language is not about Indigenous elitism, but rather to keep the Cree language alive.

knowledge. Knowledge about the sacred is transmitted through spirit that lives in words—breath is alive—thus, words can give life, but they can wound as well.

*When people make up rules as they go along, they are not following protocols—they are making up their own rules to suit their own needs. Once rationalization comes into play, then everything becomes rationalized.*

*When we talk about humans doing things to humans, it actually is more about what the spirits do. It's not only humans that are doing this—it's the trickster that is playing with humans. In modern society, everything is fragmented and dissected into pieces. People are rationalizing so they can play the game. That's what society is doing today—fragmenting everything. They're trying to do this to spirituality. The churches are doing that and in sweats, people and tricksters are trying to do that.*

On this note, I thought about how the religious philosophies of the New Age movement are a conglomerate of various pieces of different religions forged together—a mosaic of fragmented pieces rationalized together.

*I know that there are people who think they can control the dark side. That's when these people use their powers in a negative way to hurt others, even kill each other. They do that. I've seen it. That's real. This old man once said to me, "You put a string down and you walk on that string, that's how difficult it is to stay on the good side." We still think our thoughts and say things without realizing it, because we are human, we make mistakes. Humans rationalize and that's what gets them into trouble.*

On the topic of commodification, Lightning believes that there are many lodge leaders who are willing to sell the sacred for a profit.

*If there are people willing to buy spirituality, there are people willing to sell it. Today people are playing the game of putting a dollar value on the sweat lodge. There are expectations that a certain amount of money will result in an equal amount of spiritual gain. The ones doing this are the Born Again Elders/Indians, but also White people. People are buying shaking tents or they buy a Sun Dance.*

*I heard about a man who gave someone \$10,000 to run a Sun Dance on a reserve. It costs money to hold a sweat lodge—money to buy wood, fuel to travel to get rocks, money to buy food for the feast afterwards. Money can be offered to the grandfather to assist with expenses, but it is voluntary.*



*The sweat lodge has transitioned over time to where there are little fears or understandings about the power of the spirit world. Modernity has fragmented to the point where wrongdoings are rationalized excusing inappropriate behaviours in sweat lodges. One of the oddest things has to do with the calling-in of strange beings and not knowing how to send them back to the spirit world.*

*People have been seeing strange beings on the reserve over the past twenty-five years. People that normally wouldn't say these things are reporting sightings of strange beings on our land—nobody knows where these beings are coming from. I'm wondering if it's from people playing with the powers of the spirit world, calling-in spirits, and not knowing how to send them back. I don't know.*

*Somebody is bringing them here. They didn't get here by accident or maybe they did by those who don't know what they're doing. If you go into a sweat and call them in, the dark side sees that, and they say here's my chance to get in. Because the sweat lodge is created and is set up in a way that it becomes the door to the spirit world ... if the good ones don't come in, the dark ones will. They'll use the door to come into our dimension, in a way of saying.*

Another point on transition to modernity is that Native knowledge is being lost according to Lightning. Through the process of social and spiritual fragmentation, knowledge of Native spiritual ceremonies is diminishing. As Elders pass on, so does their knowledge about sacred medicines and plants. Lightning places some of the responsibility on the shoulders of government with the banning of sacred ceremonies, residential school systems that denied spoken Native languages, Christian evangelists that deemed Native spiritual belief systems as pagan and Native peoples as devil worshippers, and the romanticism and objectification of Native cultures, heritages, and spiritual practices through acts of purchase such seen in New Age religions. However, Lightning states that Native parents must teach their children about their culture, rather than blaming it all on colonization. Even in his own life, he wonders if his son would know what to do with his pipe and the ceremonies should the Creator unexpectedly call him.

Lightning was raised to believe that there is only one God, Creator, or however a person chooses to name this higher power. He also stated that people get caught in a trap of “owning their God.”

*I grew up in a family open to different religious beliefs. My aunt was a Catholic nun, Sister LeClaire. My nohtâwiy let me sit in on religious discussions between my aunt and him. So I believe that there is one God or Creator, however you want to call this spiritual being. My father had great respect for all religions. He was a healer and a mentor to many people. Today, people talk like they own God. But he's neither an Indian God, nor a White God. Really God is universal—an entity, a being, a spirit. Wars have been fought in the name of God, when in reality there is only one God known by many different names.*

*We have our sweats and we pray. I guess nowadays people are scared because for a while, people were taking our religion away from us and changed it into something else. Residential schools were the greatest break in our cultural ways of life. We are still recovering from this devastating event.*

The popularity and necessity of sweat lodges has increased in today's world, as society searches for spiritual answers. Various stresses and a continuation of fragmentation is forcing people to look for spiritual peace in their lives. Women's involvement in sweat lodges indicates a change and transition in society today. It used to be that Cree women didn't enter the sweat lodge, but that has changed.

*This old man asked a young woman, “Why are women sweating today?” She replied, “Grandfather, with all due respect, I need to say this. Long ago the women were so busy working that they didn't have time to do that. Today what the women have to face in reference to a long time ago is different. Today the women have to work and have to do all these things. We have different rules today compared to before. Several rules are to bring up the child, feed the child, and be home and keep the home going. Today we're the bread-keepers, we are the ones that go out to work, we are the ones who bring up our children, we are the leaders, and we are all these things that wasn't there before. And we have these problems that we have to deal with. So today I need the sweat because there are so many stresses. So grandfather will all due respect, that's why I sweat today.*

*The elder sat there and listened. He said, “You know grandchild, you are right. Thank you for that. I appreciate that.” I thought she did that in such a good way.*

*She didn't speak harshly to him and she said it in a respectful way. She was very positive in how she talked to her grandfather. She said it with affirmation, this is who I am, and this is what I am today. My grandmother before was this, but my life is changed where I need to sweat because of all the things I facing today, compared to before. So it made sense.*

I returned to the original reason of why I came to meet Lightning in the first place—I was looking for a story on how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people. This is what he had to say.

*I asked the question one time about the sweats. When was the Cree himself given the sweat? The answer I was given was... no one individual was given a sweat. Everyone was given a sweat for different reasons. Everyone has a different sweat for different purposes. There are bear sweats, various healing sweats, there's the muskrat sweat, there's even a woman's sweat now, there's different sweats, and so everyone was given these different gifts by the Creator to share among the people. A lot of the songs are the same he said. Our prayers are the same. The reason he said is that we all pray to the same Creator. That's where the songs come from. And sometimes, different people give songs to us. Like the song I was given, it is the grandmother spirit song that honours all ceremonies.*

*Everyone was given a sweat, given different songs, ways to do different ceremonies for different reasons. That's why there are different processes. The Cree covered a vast area of land. The Blackfoot are a larger tribe located in Western Canada and into the United States where they are called the Blackfeet. We have the Swampy Cree, the Woodland Cree, and the Eastern Cree ... some of the Cree up North never sweat—they've come south to learn about the sweat lodge from the Western Cree. I was told that it was never given to one specific person because if you remember the Cree didn't have villages. The Cree traveled in small family units. We travelled in family groupings. We didn't travel in large tribes like the Blackfoot or the Sioux. So the sweat was not given to one particular person among the Cree.*

This question did spark an interest in Lightning. He said that he would continue to look into this, as there may be a story on how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people or as Waugh (1996:55) reports, “like pipes, sweat lodges probably originally came about among the Cree as a result of dreams.” If there is such as story, I wonder if it was lost

through the same process as pirating of spirit or the DNA sequence of cultural knowledge through colonization.

Drawing this interview to a close, there are a few more stories from Lightning that I wish to include that reiterate human interconnection to animals and the spirit world. Lightning talked about an incident that took place on Vancouver Island in 1970. The National Indian Brotherhood of Ottawa called a meeting when George Manuel was president. A ceremony was planned, a huge feast was prepared, and none of the leaders and politicians from Ottawa showed up, even though they called the meeting.

*My nohtâwi said, "You see this? Do you see the leaders? They call us to do this, they want us to take care of the spiritual part, and they can't be here themselves. Take all the food outside. We have a lot of food. We'll have to share. I'm going to call the animals—they'll come." I was looking around and there were four of us there. So my dad started to pray and birds started to come—eagles, all kinds of birds and other animals came. Fish were jumping out of the water. My dad said, "Take the food and distribute it among them. Put it in the water, put it everywhere." I walked around and the birds didn't move. I threw all the food out. By the time I finished putting everything out my father had prayed. When he said, "Miciw"—it means eat in our language, the birds started to eat, just like they understood that word. Not one of them ate until my father said, "Miciw." When they were finished he said, "It's time." He stood up with his hands up in the air. The birds gathered at his feet. Then they swirled up and shot into the sky. It was one of the most unbelievable sights I had ever seen. That's what spirituality showed me.*

This story demonstrates the interconnection people have with the animal kingdom, outside the sweat lodge and likewise, this relationship exists inside the lodge. It was observed in the story told by Lightning when the polar bear breathed hot air in his face, acknowledging him as part of his family. The animal feasting story shows that the birds understood the Cree word "miciw," as they did not begin to eat the food until they were instructed to do so. There are after all, old Cree stories of a time when "animals and men talk[ed] to each other" (Bauer 1971:12).

In summary, the sweat lodge ceremony is a place of prayer where people enter into another dimension recognized as the spirit world. The ceremony teaches us about natural laws by way of the supernatural powers that exist within creation—recalling the story about the grandfather who came out of the rocks. Through the process of cultural, social, and spiritual fragmentation, people have taken it upon themselves to make up their own protocols around sacred ceremonies. From a traditional Cree perspective, “to play around with spirits” is to result in a consequence of payment for violating universal laws. Unlike sacred text such as the Christian Bible, the Islamic Qur’an, or Hindu Vedic Texts, Native protocols around sweat lodge ceremonies are unwritten laws—they are learned experientially and passed on with strict regard. The powers of the spirit world are observed through our interactions with the natural world.

## Chapter Seven: Synthesis of Interview Responses

### Introduction

This chapter synthesizes the data gathered from the research participants to determine whether, how, and why Spirit Piracy is taking place in and around Native sweat lodge ceremonies today. The chapter begins with a brief synopsis of the history and purpose of the sweat lodge, followed by an analysis of the research questions asked. Findings indicate that protocols based on natural laws are not well understood by sweat lodgers. There also is a general agreement among interview participants that modernity has altered traditional ways of ceremony. At times the interviewees differed in what they believed to be appropriate protocols. Literature review and serendipitous data that arose during this research project also support or contradict interviewee responses.

Eight interviews conducted in this research show all participants agree that the Native sweat lodge ceremony is: a) an ancient spiritual practice governed by natural laws; b) a source of spiritual healing and renewal increasingly being sought by society; and c) an opening to the spirit world where communication between humans and spirits is amplified. It also is understood that the sweat lodge ceremony has positionality—meaning that the spirits called into the lodge enliven it with their presence.

### **7.1 A brief synopsis of the history, purpose, and process of the Native sweat lodge ceremony**

Native sweat lodges have existed since before the arrival of Europeans to Canada (Manitopyes 2008). Historical accounts of these ceremonies among the Cree (and other Native tribes) across Canada are well documented in anthropological, ethnographic, and

religious journals and reports since the early 1600's.<sup>48</sup> Evidence that the Cree practiced sweat lodge ceremonies appeared in the *Jesuit Relations* (1610-1791) and Hudson's Bay Company Records (Isham 1743; Richards c. 1804-1811; Thwaites 1896-1901). An extensive list of historical scholars writing on the Cree (and other tribal groups that refer to the Cree) is included in Chapter 4, *The Native Sweat Lodge*.

When I searched for a story on how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people, I failed to find one as it exists in the Blackfoot and Nez Perce traditions. The closest I came to finding this story was in the scholarly works of Speck (1925:17-18) and Bruchac (1993:67-69). Both mentioned a Montagnais-Naskapi (Cree) story about a Bear and the sweat lodge. Interestingly enough, the Cree in Western Canada pray to the bear (*musqua*) spirit in the western doorway. Furthermore, bear grease and bear root medicine is used in Cree sweats. These practices build as historical evidence of a connection between the Cree and the *musqua* spirit. If there was a story about how the sweat lodge came to the Cree people, it may have been lost through their travels from the east to western Canada or as Waugh (1996: 55) suggests, "Like the pipe, it may have come through dreams." Among the Cree much spiritual knowledge comes from the ancestors through dreams and vision quests (Manitopyes 2008). However, what if the possibility exists that there was such a story, but that it was lost through colonization? This could be interpreted as a form of Spirit Piracy in that the story would be part of the Cree's cosmology—it would be similar to losing the DNA sequencing of culture that stories hold.

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<sup>48</sup> A list of resources on various academics that wrote on the sweat lodge is noted in chapter 4—many of which are on the Cree across Canada.

Interviewees and literature tell us that the original purpose of the Cree sweat lodge was to purify and heal the body from sickness (Manitopyes 2008; Soft White Cloud Woman 2007). Sweat lodge sizes were small, holding between 4 to 6 people, and were used by individual families. Among the Omushkego Cree, James Bay area in northern Ontario, Bird (2007) says that,

Our Cree people used the sweatlodge but, to my understanding, they didn't see it as a spiritual thing—they used it purely for medical purposes. When somebody was exposed to extreme cold and was having a seizure, or fits, they created a little sweatlodge to heat the guy until his muscles relaxed—because they had twitched into a ball of muscle. (Bird 2007:101).

Today, the sweat lodge among the Cree is used to communicate with the spirit world where in comparison with the past the shaking tent ceremony was used for this purpose (Manitopyes 2008; Fine Day 1973:21). Lightning (2008) talked about how shaking tents are being sold for anyone to buy. Likewise, “how to build your own sweat lodge” is available on the Internet, but this is wanting of the ceremonial process that can only be learned experientially (Proulx-Turner 2007).

The process of the Native sweat lodge ceremony is prescriptive in nature. The construction of the lodge, heating rocks in a fire, placing them in a pit inside the lodge, and pouring water on the hot rocks to create steam is a sweat lodge. What makes it a spiritual ceremony is in its processes governed by protocols based in natural laws. Knowing how to communicate with the spirit world requires years of training. Each of the four “rounds” represents a different stage or level of the ceremony—they have associated songs, teachings, and varying purposes (Lerat 2007; Soft White Cloud Woman



2007; Anonymous Tsuu T'ina elder 2007; Proulx-Turner 2007; Willard 2008; Manitopyes 2008; Northern Lights Boy 2008; Lightning 2008).

## **7.2 Interviewee responses to the three main research questions**

### **1. What are the protocols around the Native sweat lodge ceremony?**

As previously noted, Native sweat lodge ceremonies differ from one another, but no matter the lodge, protocols are always based on natural laws. Protocols are procedural processes. Natural laws are unwritten laws given to all sacred beings at the time of creation by the Creator spirit. Along with having a sacred energy imbued in everything<sup>49</sup> that became an embodied spirit, each was given a purpose and a duty to perform. Thus, ants perform a purpose, bees pollinate flowers in the spring, and the moon provides guidance and comforts us at night. Humans were told to pray to and give thanks to the spirit of all creation—we are to respect all creatures, the land, the water, and the air. In ceremony, protocols revolve around processes that first acknowledge the spirit of the rocks, the fire, the water, and the medicines. Following a series of actions creates a pathway to the spirit world. The entire process begins with an offering of tobacco that with the wind spirit carries our prayers to the Creator. A sweat lodge ceremony does not begin with the first splash on the hot rocks—it begins with the tobacco because tobacco is a spirit (Lightning 2008).

Protocols are passed on to lodge holders in a variety of rituals such as fasts, vision quests, and Sun Dances, through dreams, and from respected community elders. The

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<sup>49</sup> “Everything” includes humans, plants, animals, water, wind, sun, moon and stars—all of creation has a purpose, a task to perform.

process of building a sweat lodge also follows protocol in the collection of materials, where to build it, whether it will be a medicine, bear, or muskrat sweat (just to mention a few), the way in which a sacred fire is prepared, and the entire process on how the ceremony is conducted. Protocols encompass knowledge about social conduct in and around the lodge and most of all years of acquired knowledge in how to work with the spirit world.

The ceremony begins with an offering of tobacco to the spirit of the willow asking for its permission to be dislodged from its community (Cole 2006:25). This process is repeated when gathering wood, rocks, and locating a piece of land to construct a sweat lodge. “Every part of the sweat lodge is a ceremony in itself” (Proulx-Turner 2007). Ethics and protocols around sweat lodge ceremonies include basic rules such as: no cameras, no substance use, and no abusive behaviours such as fighting, swearing, or sexual explicitness. In short, the traditional Native sweat lodge is a place of prayer, similar to a Jewish Synagogue, an Anglican Church, or a Buddhist Temple. Unlike organized religions that have written texts such as the Christian Holy Bible, Hindu Vedic Texts, or the Muslim Qur’an—protocols of Native sweat lodges are based in unwritten natural laws—they are learned experientially with the guidance of experienced Native elders/spiritual mentors.

Protocols around sweat lodge ceremonies work in conjunction with natural laws (fire, water, air, and earth) of the natural world and the sacred energies of the universe—these were elaborated on in chapter 6 where Manitopyes (2008) spoke on “the four levels of spiritual communication.” Manitopyes (2008) further stated that the steam which rises from the water poured on the hot rocks during the ceremony is yet another natural law—

it is *Mat-su-win*—Mother Earth’s breath of life. Natural laws work with the spiritual energies of another dimension—that of the physical and spirit worlds together, as one, they are inseparable.

The ceremony is conducted in an orderly fashion where the person with the water is in direct communication with the spirit world. Therefore, all actions are done with a specific purpose/reason that has a prayer attached to it (Manitopyes 2008). When an individual throws medicines on the rocks without a reason or even worse does this without permission when someone else is pouring the water is to lack respect for the lodge ceremony. This also pirates the spirit of the medicine, the rocks, the water, the lodge, and the people within the lodge—it is a person imposing his or her will over that of the positionality of the lodge and the Creator spirit.

Northern Lights Boy (2008) described protocols around pipes and how “we must pray and sing for the stem, the stone, and when the two come together—this is something people don’t know.” The pipe acts like a key that opens the eastern, southern, western and northern doorways—it also opens the in-between doorways (the south-eastern, south-western, north-western, and north-eastern doorways). “The opening of these doorways is followed by the calling-in of animal spirits. This all has to do with spirits and spiritual energies. There is so much to know” (Soft White Cloud Woman 2008). Both Proulx-Turner (2007) and Lightning (2008) emphasized the importance of knowing a pipe’s history. This is to know the spirit attached to the pipe. There is a belief among pipe holders that it is possible for a bad spirit to be attached to it as well, which is why buying a pipe from a pawn shop or on the Internet is unwise. A buyer would not be aware of the

pipe's true history. This could result in a negative consequence where the buyer could become sick as the bad spirit is released from the pipe when smoked.

Protocols include singing sacred songs that call the spirits into the lodge and songs to send them back home at the end of the ceremony (Proulx-Turner 2007; Soft White Cloud Woman 2007; Northern Lights Boy 2008; Lightning 2008). Songs are sung to the four cardinal directions to call-in animals and ancestral spirits. Prayers are said to honour those that have crossed over to the spirit world, to the Little People, to the winged-ones, the four-legged ones, and the water-beings (Manitopyes 2008). Prayers acknowledge the spirit of the grandmother and grandfather rocks, the water, the willows, the medicines, and mother earth as we ask for them to heal us. It is imperative to pray to these spirits first showing them our humility and willingness to receive healing. The spirit world is powerful, but many people today do not understand this, instead they “play around with the spirits and the ceremonies” (Lerat 2007; Soft White Cloud Woman 2007; Proulx-Turner 2007; Anonymous Tsuu T'ina elder 2007; Northern Lights Boy 2008; Manitopyes 2008).

As mentioned in the interviews, there are varying opinions about proper protocols in and around the sweat lodge can differ. Areas of differences focused on menstruating women and ceremony, clothing, and the use of Christianity in Native ceremonies. Beginning with the role of women in sacred ceremonies, Proulx-Turner (2007) suggested that women have been excluded from various ceremonies as a direct result of Christian beliefs imposed through colonization that “demonized” or perceived women as being “dirty” during their moon-time (menstrual cycle). Literature reviews both support and debunk this belief. Anderson (2000) argues:

The equation of women as creator and intermediary is also evident in the sweat lodge ceremony, which is often referred to as a symbol of a mother's womb. People go into the sweat lodge to communicate with the spirit world, and the lodge, like mother's womb, is a place of transformation. The lodge is also a place for purification. Some women, like Ivy Chaske (Dakota), believe that women do not need to go into the sweat lodge because they have the ability to cleanse and purify themselves through menstruation. Traditional understanding of menstruation was perceived as a spiritually charged occurrence. Taboos that called for the isolation of menstruating women were common among Native cultures. (Anderson 2000:73-74).

... Whatever the traditions, menstruation was a sign of the incredible power of the universe. Contact with Europeans was to change this thinking. Judeo-Christian culture saw menstruation not as a manifestation of female power, but as a manifestation of female sin, contamination and inferiority. Missionaries did not understand menstruation as a sacred gift; rather, they taught women to see it from western eyes, as a 'curse.' (Anderson 2000:75).

Gill (1982) adds:

We can appreciate the fact that the blood of menstruation outside a cultural context is symbolically ambiguous. In some cultural contexts, it is the most polluting and threatening of substances; the menstruant is isolated from others, especially potent men, a practice common among Algonquin tribes. But the blood of menstruation can just as well symbolize the powers of fecundity. In this case, the menstruant is in possession of powerful medicine and contact with her is sought by the ailing that they might be cured, by children that they might grow and learn, and by the aged that they might continue to live. This attitude is common on the Southwest. (Gill 1982:79-80).

Manitopyes (2008), Northern Lights Boy (2008), and Lightning (2008) believe that there are a variety of reasons why menstruating women are not allowed around spiritual ceremonies—they too believe that women cleanse themselves each month through the release of blood. George Kehewin (1994) stated that,

Women are far, far ahead of men. It's quite hard to understand, but when you start living in the Native culture, you will. You [women] are like Mother Earth, who once a year in the spring, washes herself down the river to the ocean. Everything....all the debris is washed away. Same thing with a woman, except it's every month. It's the power you have. You cannot enter a lodge or a spiritual gathering because you will kill all the prayers and offerings in there. You are more powerful than all of it, and if you come in you can't fool the spirits. At Sundances, if a woman in her time comes near the lodge, the singers and dancers know. I have to tell the older women to tell the younger ones not to stay around if they are like that. It's not because we don't like them, it's the power they have. They're way ahead of me. (Kehewin 1994:152).

The overall sense for not allowing menstruating women in sweat lodges is more about adhering to a natural law because the “spirit” of blood has the power to cancel out a medicine person's ability to communicating with the spirit world—it is not about denying menstrual women access to a spiritual practice. Lightning (2008) believes that when menstrual women are on their spirit time, they are being cleansed physically and spiritually. His grandfather, Albert Lightning told him a story of having witnessed a time when a young woman entered the Sun Dance while she was menstruating—the spirits lifted her up in the air and took her out of the arbour and set her down gently (Lightning 2008). I remember a time where I attended a sweat lodge ceremony and without my knowledge a menstruating woman was also there—the ensuing consequence was that everyone got sick—the men especially vomited, as I almost did. The smell of hot, musky blood did not agree with me. For this reason, I prefer not to sweat with women on their time.

As for the protocols around dress codes for women, particularly in mixed (co-ed) sweats, all participants except two agreed that women should wear long skirts or dresses

and sit with their legs together and to the side. The Native men interviewees (in particular) felt this was a crucial part of protocol because it denoted respect for the lodge, women and their bodies, and to men as some of them would be “challenged by the women’s sexual powers” (Northern Lights Boy 2008). For the most part, respondents named White women as being particularly notorious for sitting with their legs apart, sometimes without wearing under pants. It was interesting to learn that these men felt weakened spiritually by women who “open themselves up this way”—this was a very honest and vulnerable response by the men I interviewed. Ironically, men sit with their legs apart, but elders do not explain why this difference exists.

There are some mixed lodges in urban centres where participants go in naked. The issue being around “mixed” (co-ed) sweats, as groups such as the Crow do have nude sweats, but it is always with people of the same gender. Lerat (2007) wondered what nudity in mixed sweat lodges proved? “How can someone go in there naked and not have a sexual thought?” (Lerat 2007). Proulx-Turner (2007) disagreed with protocols around women’s clothing and nudity in women only lodges. The subject of nudity in mixed lodges was greatly opposed by the majority of respondents. Overall, the topic of nudity in mixed sweats was considered a collapse of Western-colonial and Native worldviews since non-Native peoples have been allowed into the lodge. This may be in part because saunas in Europe such as the Finnish sauna allows for mixed nudity. However, as described earlier in chapter 4, Lopatin (1960:977-993) argues that Native sweat lodge ceremonies are not the same as European baths and saunas.

Rationalization has blurred protocols to where arguments are nonsensical. Such is the argument that since we were naked in our mother’s womb, we should be naked in the

sweat lodge as it represents the womb of mother earth. This argument contradicts Native traditional ways of ceremony—it is simply, colonialism having entered the lodge (Lightning 2008). Proper protocols and ways to run a sweat lodge, as Bucko (1999:81) points out, is “the debate over propriety [that] is an important factor in validating one’s practice of the ritual.” As protocols vary between and within different and same nations, the sweat lodge process becomes highly subjective. Bird (2005:239-240) adds that money also has confused First Nation communities,

The young people, they don’t know anything about it. But because there is money, the money comes with that, and then they just form any kind of a canvas and a bit of hot stones for the sweat lodge and throw water in it and they go in there stark naked, and they say, ‘I am practicing a tradition.’ No, my friend, that’s not the way it is. Everything is distorted; power is money. (Bird 2005:239-240).

There was a point in this research when I wondered if there might be two sets of protocols: one between humans and the spirit world—when people are in direct prayer with the spirits; and a second set, between humans as “man-made” protocols—when people decide on protocols around clothing, sitting positions, and social conduct around the lodge ceremony. But, as Lightning (2008) graciously pointed out, “to separate and categorize protocols would be to continue a process of fragmentation, justification, and rationalization that would excuse and allow human behaviours to violate natural laws.” It can be argued that I have also fallen into the binary trap of spiritual fragmentation throughout the thesis, as I have attempted to shine a light on a problematic social phenomenon occurring around lodges. I can agree with this assessment in my juxtaposition of colonial and Indigenous worldviews. As I too live in a world of colonial



assumptions and paradigms, this trap is easy to fall into. As an old man once said to Lightning, “You put a string down and you walk on that string, that’s how difficult it is to stay on the good side” (Lightning 2008). Because we are human, we will make mistakes. This is part of the human experience. However, human beings cannot use this as a convenient excuse, as we must all strive for awareness, accountability, and responsibility. The Tsuu T’ina elder (2007) said, “rules we set for the sweat lodge are the same ones we must live by ourselves outside the lodge—people are watching our every action, holding us accountable to our own rules of conduct.”

In summary, protocols are complex and quite variable from lodge to lodge. Protocols work with the sacred energies of the natural world. These are the natural laws. Protocols guiding sweat lodges are important because they create a pathway for spiritual communication between people and the spirit world. As there are “good” and “bad” spirits, protocols ensure a passage to the “good” spirits. When a sweat lodge ceremony is taking place, communication with the spirit world is amplified, where spirits are called in to the ceremony from the four cardinal doorways and at times, from the in-between doorways. A lodge leader must fully understand the implications of working with the powers of the spirit world.

## 2. How does the Native sweat lodge teach us about natural laws?

Natural laws refer to the relationships humans and plants and animals have with the rest of the natural world. This includes the four basic elements of air, earth, fire, and water and the unseen world of spirits (Manitopyes 2008). In the words of Albert Lightning (1991:83), “the humans’ inner nature is an exact copy of the nature of the

universe, and deep knowledge of the self comes from nature.” For instance, the wind is considered a relative possessing a spirit. Similarly, the sun, moon, and stars also have spirits. Every part of the natural world has a spirit that must be respected as an individual entity. Communication between all aspects of the natural world takes place at all levels of existence—at the physical and spirit levels, as in the description of the Cree three-tiered universe (Mandelbaum 1979:302).

The Native sweat lodge ceremony teaches us about natural laws as we work with them in the gathering of the materials to build the lodge by placing tobacco on Mother Earth while speaking to the spirit of the willows. Lerat (2007) tells us that the fire and rocks have spirits—“a person must learn how to work with these energies/spirits or be burned.” Tinker (2004:106-108) asserts that, “rocks talk and have what we must call consciousness. And we must extend our discussion of rocks to trees...and to the rest of the created world around us.” Thus, the natural world is a repository of wisdom because trees, rocks, etc. have an ability to hear and talk. Working with the fire, wood, and rocks also teaches humanity how to work together—for “without the wood, there would be no fire, without the rocks there would be not sweat lodges, they all come together” (Lerat 2007). During the sweat lodge ceremony everyone comes together in prayer and unison with the sacred energies of natural laws.

Tobacco is an intermediary between people and the Creator. The spirit of the tobacco takes our prayers to the higher spirit levels of the universe. As already mentioned the fire-keeper works with natural laws and learns about the power of fire, air, and wood—in doing so a person learns to respect these natural laws. The four rounds work in conjunction with the four directions/doorways and represent a variety of

teachings from the natural world (Lightning 2008; Manitopyes 2008; Northern Lights Boy 2008; Soft White Cloud Woman 2007). To explain further on natural laws, each of the elements within the natural world contains its own “embodied spirit” (Henderson 2006:135-144).

All elements of nature—land, water, plants, animals, and humans—have interdependent embodied spirits that can be apprehended in diverse forms. Each spirit is considered as important and significant. Each is a gifted teacher. Neither the spirits nor the forms are capable of existing apart. These spirits and embodied forms are not seen as natural resources to be exploited; they are seen as sacred life-sustaining forces. All the spirits and the forms are vulnerable to change and they are never isolated. Changes in any one life form affect all the other life forms. (Henderson 2006:135).

Remembering that we share in the same sacred life force energy that Creator imbued in all creation; Peat (1994:55) states, “coming-to-knowing is not necessarily power in the personal sense, but in the way a person can come into relationship with the energies and animating spirits of the universe.” As an herbalist, Willard (2008) said “knowledge about plants for him is derived from sitting with plants and intuitively hearing them through feeling, as they share knowledge about their use.” A natural law is that spiritual energies have the capacity to communicate with one another—this can be knowledge gained from a plant, rock, or medicine. Spiritual communication happens even though “embodied spirits” have different forms—the person having a physical form and the wind having a non-physical form. Both are energy based with the ability to converse with each other (Manitopyes 2008). A person can speak to the wind and ask it to calm until a sweat lodge is over so that sparks from the fire will not ignite a grass fire.

Similarly, when a rattle made of buffalo hide is used in a lodge ceremony its rattling sound when shaken resonates at a frequency that the buffalo spirits can hear. According to the Cree who lead sweat lodges in the Plains area, the buffalo spirit resides in the northern doorway, thus this is the doorway that the buffalo spirit enters the lodge (Soft White Cloud Woman 2007). A buffalo horn also is used to pour water on the rocks. There is a Blackfoot story that tells of the powers of the *iniskim* (buffalo stone) and its ability to whistle. These stones were used to call the grandfather buffalo spirits during a buffalo hunt (Wissler & Duvall 1995:85-87). The buffalo is of particular significance to the Plains people in Canada and the north-central part of the United States. The Great Plains was home to “as many as sixty million animals [bison]... at the dawn of the nineteenth century” (Harrod 2000:4). Thus, respect for the spirit of the animals is to carry on with the usage of ceremonial instruments such as rattles made of animal parts, eagle bone whistles, and elk hide drums.

All stories in Native spirituality are intrinsically tied to the natural world, which is illustrated in the story told by Lightning (2008) of witnessing the grandfather who came out of the rocks. This reaffirms the interconnectedness humans have with rocks and spirit beings. The sweat lodge also teaches us about natural laws when we bear witness to the emotionality of the universe (Anonymous Tsuu T’ina elder: pers. comm., 8 February 2008). This appears in various forms such as when the polar bear appeared in front of Lightning to give him his “soul” name (Lightning 2008). There are many ways “where the Higher Powers, on their own initiative, have revealed Themselves to human beings” (Deloria 2003:86). Again, the sweat lodge teaches us about natural laws when the spirits show themselves in the form of blue lights and blue sparks (see chapter 5 on the story of

the “blue rocks”). Thus, when participants bear witness to the sacred, it is life changing and affirms the powers of the spirit world and that we are not alone on the physical plane—the unseen world of spirits does interact with us.

In closing, human beings are intrinsically tied to animals, rocks, and the rest of the natural world through the sacred energy that runs through everything. We receive confirmation of this when the spirit world reveals itself in forms we can understand—forever to be changed by this experience.

### 3. How has the Native sweat lodge ceremony transitioned over time?

Changes and transitions to the Native sweat lodge ceremony since the first sightings of them in the 1600’s are many. Government policies that forced children into residential schools coupled with government bans on First Nation spiritual ceremonies sought to break the transmission of culture, customs, language, and traditions affected five consecutive generations (Milloy 1999:19). Sadly, as Aboriginal peoples struggled to recover from the effects of “intergenerational trauma” (Brave Heart & LeBruyn 1998:59-60) from residential schools and colonization, groups of “Born Again Elders/Indians” emerged (Lightning 2008). Furthermore, Brave Heart and LeBruyn (1998:65) argue that,

American Indians still face oppression as well as spiritual persecution. We believe that the current proliferation of “New Age” imitations of traditional American Indian spiritual practices is genocidal. Insensitive and opportunistic non-Indian “healers” corrupt and attempt to profit from stereotypic distortions of traditional ceremonies. (Brave Heart & LeBruyn 1998:65).

Unfortunately, it was not only the non-Natives who took part in falsely identifying themselves as traditional Native healers and shamans, but also Native peoples as well.

Between the 1970's and 1980's these "so-called" elders pretended to be experts in traditional ceremonies. Most had little to no training in traditional ceremonies from experienced elders, yet they became experts making up tradition as they went along. Although there may have been little else to do, as few "authentic" elders remained to pass on traditional teachings. To claim or pretend to be a healer is damaging. Fake medicine men and women knowingly take advantage of vulnerable people who genuinely seek healing—this is Spirit Piracy because the violator misappropriates the spirit (spiritual energy) from another person. Although Manitopyes states that if a person's intent is to help another person heal, there is a distinction between knowingly taking advantage of another person's vulnerability. Manitopyes also states that his elders impressed on him the need to do things in the right way, which is to follow protocols. A Blackfoot teaching cautions against the misuse of spiritual powers:

The stories of *Napi* teach *Siksikaitstapi* [Blackfoot] fundamental responsibilities and powers given to them in accordance with the natural laws of the universe. It is the responsibility of the *Siksikaitstapi* to use these powers to strengthen life and not to use them for selfish and foolish reasons. Most importantly, they must not be used for personal vanity. The greatest weakness that can befall the people is for them to think they possess the powers and begin to use their knowledge for the own selfish purposes (Bastien 2004:90).

The New Age movement of the 1980's gave birth to White *Plastic Shamans and Astroturf Sun Dancers* who "pursue spiritual meaning and cultural identification through acts of purchase" (Aldred 2000:329). Many "Indian experts" gain much of their knowledge about Native spirituality from Hollywood movies, Internet sites, and New Age books that romanticize Native culture to the point of causing harm because the

sacred is objectified and sold (Hernández-Ávila 1996:345; Rose 1992:414-415; Greene 1998:31). There are even White people who advertise workshops on Native culture and “Authentic Indian Experiences” in a sweat lodge at the cost of \$1500 for a weekend getaway. According to experienced sweat lodgers, the way of the sweat lodge ceremony is a long-term life commitment, not simply a short-term weekend experience. The misappropriation of traditional knowledge serves only to objectify and commercialize the sacred for monetary profit (Lightening 2008). Manitopyes (2008) stated that, “there’s no money in sweat lodges.” Thinking of the Native sweat lodge as viable economic venture is to miss the point of Native spirituality all together. Donaldson (1999:680) posited that, “Others have attributed economic motives to this racist behavior. According to Mohawk poet Beth Brant, for example, the new-age is merely the old-age capitalism cloaked in mystic terminology, dressed in robes and skins of ancient and Indigenous beliefs.”

The layering of capitalism and western ideologies over Native worldviews has created cultural and spiritual confusion. It is what Wells (1994:48) refers to as a dissonance between visceral response and emotional discourse because people “no longer know where the lines fall”—modernity has skewed the sacred from the profane. Moreover, “external aggression and domination are inextricably bound to internal domination, repression, and violence” (Daes 1992:6). And “all forms of oppression involve a denial of the individual spirit and its quest for self-expression” (Daes 1992:5). Today, the demand for sweat lodges by the public, particularly in large urban centres, is greatly taxing Native elders (Lerat 2007). To the frustration of many credible lodge leaders, they are closing their doors “because it’s too hard” (Anonymous Tsuu T’ina elder 2007).

Another significant change is that the sweat lodge is its availability to all men, women, and children of mixed cultural background and all ages. Today, public sweat lodges are available in large urban centres, in prison systems, healing centres, and some private homes. Lodge sizes have increased from what used to be a small family lodge that sat 4-6 people to large public lodges that holds up to 40 people. In Western Canada, it is commonplace to sit beside a person of Lakota-Sioux, Navajo, Blackfoot, Tsuu T'ina, Métis, Nakota and Cree heritages in sweat lodges, sharing songs and various teachings with each other. Sweat lodge ceremonies especially in urban centres are now, pan-Indian.

Although the universality of the lodges is to be applauded, it also brings many concerns about maintaining and defining cultural heritages such as songs, protocols, and traditional teachings of one's culture and the different spirits that are brought with them. Lightning (2008) believes that a Cree sweat must be done in the Cree language (prayers and songs) otherwise it is not a Cree sweat it is a Lakota-Sioux, Blackfoot, or an English sweat. Language is critical because language has a spirit of its own that is recognized by the ancestors. Cree songs cannot be translated into English and expect to retain its nuances and deep cultural meaning.

An area of contention in sweat lodge ceremonies is the influence and use of Christianity in Native ceremonies. Lerat (2007) is concerned about the overlap of the two worldviews stating that God and Jesus belong to the White man's world. His concerns are focused on respecting Native ways of ceremony. Lightning (2008) on the other hand, was raised with both worldviews—his grandfather Albert Lightning who was a traditionalist and spiritual mentor and his great aunt Sister LeClaire, a Catholic Nun.



Likewise, the Tsuu T'ina elder says that he believes there are two Creators—"the one I call God and the other who is not right" (Tsuu T'ina elder 2007). The "other who is not right" refers to the powerful being from the dark side. Even the mention of his name aloud is not recommended. It is a name beginning with the letter "S" that is commonly used in Christian religions. Speaking this name aloud is believed to attract negative energy. This is one aspect to the deep-rooted gut-wrenching fear when a person fully grasps the severity of Spirit Piracy. This fear is about realising that wounding spirit is to wound oneself that jeopardizes one's interconnectedness with the greater spirituality of the universe. For this reason, many elders shy away from speaking about the consequences of playing with the dark side for fear that it will attract bad spirits and that it can cause death. One of the greatest fears of life is death coupled with a sense of abandonment from the spiritual source of life, of being separated from the sacred, and of having one's spirit killed. Although a spirit is energy and cannot really be killed,<sup>50</sup> it is the final separation of the spirit from its human body (and how it happens) that is feared. This fear comes from not wanting to be alienated from the greater source of life.

There are varying opinions on whether there are two Creators, one good and one bad—but all interview participants believed that there is one Creator Spirit known by many names. "All religions are inherently good, but it is man's interpretation of various religions that corrupts it. We see this in how the Islamic religion has been misinterpreted

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<sup>50</sup> In a somewhat awkward parallel to the human body that dies, "when a plant or animal is killed, its *mntu* ["invisible force or spirit embedded in life-forms" (Henderson 2006:136)] goes into the ground with its blood before it comes back and reincarnates from the ground. While their spirits await renewal, *mntu* never die" (Henderson 2006:141-142). Thus, the spiritual life force energy of the Creator Spirit embodied in various life-forms only changes forms but is never destroyed.

to justify political attacks of terrorism. The ancient Islamic religion is good, but human interpretation has corrupted it” (Anonymous Tsuu T’ina elder 2007).

How the Native sweat lodge ceremony has transitioned over time brings a considerable amount of concern. Gravest concerns focus on changing protocols, the influx of various diverse populations, and how this will affect the transmission of a cultural heritage to future Native generations. As the demand for sweat lodge ceremonies increases, particularly in inner cities, many participants fail to practice appropriate protocols that must be learned from reputable elders. Self-elected and phoney elders make up protocols as they go along, which is reshaping Native cultural identities. Even though peoples of all nations are welcomed into the lodge, what accompanies them is the spirits attached to them, which at times can be problematic.

For instance, often when New Ager enter a traditional Native sweat lodge two things happen. First, the New Ager brings with them spirits from other religious disciplines that conflict with the ancestral spirits that are called into the lodge. Secondly, New Ager often attempt to impose their belief systems (which are comprised of various religious traditions) disregarding the protocols of the lodge and the elder leading the ceremony. As a consequence, ancestral spirits are angered (by the foreign spirits and by inappropriate behaviours) at the spirit level, which is felt by the participants within the lodge (Lightning 2008; Northern Lights Boy 2008; Anonymous Tsuu T’ina elder 2007). A story in Chapter 5 on the *Violation of Natural Laws* demonstrates this.

Along the same lines as inappropriate actions by New Ager is the practice of using the sweat lodge for contacting the dark side. Lightning (2008), Northern Lights Boy (2008), and the Tsuu T’ina elder (2007) stated that there are grave consequences to

doing this. Willard (2008) on the other hand, does not believe that novice sweat lodgers have the ability to call-in bad spirits. However, all the other interviewees oppose this belief stating that this is precisely what allows the “bad ones” to enter the lodge (Lightning 2008; Northern Lights Boy 2008). Just as the shaking tent ceremony was used to see into the spirit world—to find lost items, place love medicine on others, and throw bad medicine on other medicine men (Bird 2005:100-101)—the sweat lodge ceremony also is used to accomplish this today (Northern Lights Boy 2008). Placing bad medicine or love medicine on others using the sweat lodge ceremony is a misuse of the ceremony, thus a form of Spirit Piracy.

The consequence to violating natural laws is that someone pays (Lerat 2007; Proulx-Turner 2007; Lightning 2008; Northern Lights Boy 2008). The overall sense from interview participants is that the lodge ceremony has changed significantly over time, both for the good and also in negative ways. Manitopyes (2008) states that, “there are crazy elders out there who are changing things around to where a male elder leads a women’s sweat—that’s not a women’s sweat, this is wrong” ... “Traditionalists don’t like to complain too much, but my elders taught me to teach people the right way of doing things.”

Willard (2008) believes that the Native sweat lodge is but a Temazcal in Mexico or an Omgon in Mongolia and that the Finnish and Swedish have sweats, just configured differently. Lopatin (1960:990) counter-argues this by saying, ““the Greco-Roman bath and the Turkish bath are so different in many important respects from the Native American and the Sauna of north-western Europe that it is illogical to classify them together or to see in them a common origin.”

Willard (2008) sees the need for sweat lodges in today's society as many people search for spiritual guidance. He believes that any attempt by individuals to move themselves forward is good. However, he did see a difference in the lodges that are situated on his property to whom he rents space to—one he said is more serious led by a Métis group who are Sun Dancers as well; while the other lodge is lead by a woman with 35 years of Shamanic training who incorporates New Age teachings. The second lodge, Willard said he did not “feel,” thus had not taken part in a ceremony there. He stated that it was, “for lack of better words, a sweat lodge on training wheels” (Willard 2008). Thinking of a sweat lodge as being on training wheels is extremely problematic for traditional Native sweat lodge leaders. The main concern is around dabbling in ancient knowledge systems that can easily open doors to the dark side.

Another way that sweat lodges have transitioned is by the attendance of those who claim to have been an “Indian/Native in a past-life.” Willard (2008) himself believes that he too was a Native in a past-life. This again is another contentious topic, as many White people arrive at the sweat lodge believing they have an entitlement to intimate secrets about the ceremony because of their past-life claim. Willard (2008) however, does not believe that this entitled him to anything; instead he saw this as having given him a certain higher level of responsibility, rather than privileges.

*Because I come with a grid of understanding that I could make mistakes and have the wrong things happen, and probably have in my life, then I can go back and resurrect them and change those around. So responsibility is probably the most important aspect of privilege. It's more important than the right to be able to do something. Responsibility is to do it right (Willard 2008).*

Once again, Native elders are extremely cautious with those who claim to have been Native in a past-life, as they have repeatedly experienced Whites who attempt to “take

over” or correct the leaders/elders even after a few sweat lodges (Proulx-Turner 2007; Tsuu T’ina elder 2007; Lightning 2008). This is made clear when a New Age male tried to patent the Native sweat lodge ceremony “since Native people were no longer performing it correctly” (Whitt 2005:169).<sup>51</sup> Thus, the greatest concern over sweat lodges today is the impact modernity has had on traditional knowledge and how this will impact future Native generations who struggle to protect their cultural and spiritual heritage.

In the words of Wells (1994:48), “society is reacting to post-modernism ... people “no longer know where the lines fall” between the sacred and the profane. Five hundred years of colonization has blurred this line for Native and non-Native peoples alike. It is not only the Whites that have endeavoured to manipulate reality but many Native peoples are now doing this as well for colonialism has afflicted everyone. Taboos and boundaries that define the sacred no longer exist to where “traditional distinctions have been trivial, but [to] others have been earth-shaking” (Wells 1994:48). What is taking place is not “reasoned discourse but a visceral response, an emotional reaction” to the loss of the sacred in post-modernity (Wells 1994:48). “Blurring of the lines” is addressed in the next segment, on various ways that the sacred and the Native sweat lodge ceremony are misappropriated and the consequences attached to this.

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<sup>51</sup> Laurie Whitt references this as, “it was related by Robert Antone in ‘Education as a Vehicle for Values and Sovereignty,’ and address given at the Third International Native American Studies conference at Lake Superior State University in October 1991” (2005:185).

### 7.3 Interviewee responses to the two sub-questions

4. What behaviours around the lodge indicate that protocols and natural laws are not well understood?

Several examples have already been given that demonstrate how protocols are violated, such as acts of sexual abuse by Native and New Age “elders” in lodges, Spiritual Eites who suck the energy from innocent and vulnerable people, and those who either sell or make up traditional knowledge as they go along (Tsuu T’ina elder 2007; Lightning 2008; Stout 2005). The New Age movement is responsible for creating new religions by piecing together parts of other world religions. The greatest problem with constructing a new religion in this way is that it borrows identities from others because it does not have its own. New Age religions are like clones without souls—they are symbolic, but lack substance. New Age religions have romanticized and misappropriated Native spiritual practices by taking complex rituals out of their traditional context and shaping them into something else that does not resemble its original form. This is considered Spirit Piracy because the spirit of complex Native beliefs, symbols, and ceremonies such as the sweat lodge are pirated through misappropriation and exploitation. For instance, there are pipe carriers who have bought their pipes on the Internet, not knowing the pipe’s history or its spirit—if it even has one (Proulx-Turner 2007; Lightning 2008). Fake shamans and medicine men and women use vulnerable people as test subjects to practice their spiritual powers. They are in essence playing with spirits and this has grave consequences (Northern Lights Boy 2008).

These infractions are serious because it demonstrates that natural order of the universe is thwarted. Individuals that throw medicine on the rocks haphazardly or

interrupt elders or the person pouring the rounds lack respect or knowledge of the ceremonial process and protocols. Again the story on *Violating Natural Laws* in Chapter 5 tells of a New Age young woman who attend a sweat lodge—she was burned by the fire spirit even before entering the lodge, upon entry, she “mimed for spirits,” then she proceeded to throw water on the grandfather rocks with great force as to assert her will over that of the spirit of the rocks. Consequentially, the sweat lodge shook, the spirits scratched on the canvas outside the lodge, and the medicine men present were challenged (Anonymous Tsuu T’ina elder 2007; Northern Lights Boy 2008). This is how a person knows that protocols are violated—the spirits become angry, which is felt at the physical level (Anonymous Tsuu T’ina elder 2007).

When protocols of natural laws are violated, an inversion in the natural order of the Cree three-tier universe takes place. Humans invert the natural order of the universe by attempting to place themselves above or equal to the spirit levels. Spirit Piracy is the human violation of natural laws. It happens when humans disrupt, negate, or wound the embodied spirit of people, places, and things. When people sell a sweat lodge or a shaking tent they are pirating the spiritual positionality of the lodge and the spirit of cultural knowledge.

5. Are there consequences to violating natural laws? If so, what are they?

All interview participants agreed that there are consequences to violating natural laws, particularly with ceremonial rituals such as people who misuse spiritual knowledge or pretend to know about sacred ceremonies only to play around with the spirits. This results in consequences that come in the form of sickness to the person doing the

violation or to his or her family—this can last multiple generations as learned in the story about the “Woman Spirit Wandering” (Lightning 2008).

In Wilson (2008:107), Stan (a respondent in Wilson’s research) stated that,

Regarding relational accountability, in Cree the words that form the basis of that concept are “*otcinawin*” (breaking of natural law), which means that if a person deliberately mistreats other creatures, that action will invoke natural justice. So they will receive similar treatment either to themselves or their descendents...even to seven generations. And the other word is “*pastahowin*,” which means the breaking of a sacred law. This action will invoke natural justice and will surely befall the perpetrator. This all means therefore that humans, who are capable of knowing the difference, are accountable for all their actions to all their relations. (Wilson 2008:107).

The belief in consequences to misappropriation of spirituality is echoed in the writings of Hernández-Ávila (1996):

The perversion of ceremonies and distortion of rituals can cause people to get hurt because they are ‘messing around’ with spirituality, and they don’t know what they’re doing. Besides the fact that people could get hurt, physically, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, or in any combination thereof, what is costly for the Native American community is the loss of potential and actual support for legitimate issues. (Hernández-Ávila 1996:345).

Respondents reported healings of participants in sweat lodge ceremonies such as when pain is removed from the body, lost memories are recovered, and people allow themselves to cry where they previously were not able (Lightning 2008). Conversely, the ultimate consequence to inappropriate human behaviours around ceremonies results in the human spirit emotionally, mentally, and spiritually distancing itself from the spirituality of the universe.



Again, the story shared by Lightning (2008) addressed the appearance of strange spiritual beings roaming the reserve in Hobbema, Alberta and on other reserves as well. People who would not otherwise report such sightings are speaking about this. Lightning (2008) suggested that some of these strange beings are showing up because people have called-in spirits and do not know how to send them back. He also suspects that New Agers who work with the dark side have called-in these spirits—whether these beings are here by accident or not is unknown.

Another story involves a sweat lodge ceremony at a medium-security facility in Alberta.<sup>52</sup> A former White prisoner of the Institution was hired as an “Elder,” which part of his duties entails leading sweat lodge ceremonies. On the premise of performing a healing ceremony, this “phoney” elder has inmates pretend that he is a former woman from the inmate’s past, who the inmate hates. He instructs inmates to strike the ground and whip the inside of the lodge with a stick as hard as they can, while at the same time, swearing at him. As the sweat lodge is widely recognized as Mother Nature’s womb, such performances by plastic shamans serve only to disrespect the sweat lodge and women in ceremony, and also to perpetuate a cycle of violence. It is noted that this “elder” was not properly transferred the right to lead lodges by way of Sun Dance ceremony or Bundle transfers. He was convicted of heinous crimes and has not healed himself. The Corrections Services Canada allows this to continue because they do not understand the significance and sacredness of this ceremony (Anonymous: pers. comm., 20 February 2008).

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<sup>52</sup> The actual prison name is being withheld for safety reasons of the informant.

A comment made by Proulx-Turner (2007) reaffirmed similar concerns saying that former inmates, sexual abusers, and batterers who upon release from prison attend sweat lodges and within a short time they lead these ceremonies. They are substituting one addiction for another, while continuing to sexually abuse, batter, or emotionally manipulate others. Many lodge leaders welcome the help of former inmates to assist in lodge preparations such as gathering wood and rocks, building the fire, and working around the lodge. However, gifting these helpers with ceremonial items such as pipes, eagle fans, rattles, medicines, and the right to conduct ceremony before they are spiritually, emotionally, and mentally healed, only perpetuates the cycle of abuse. Furthermore, innocent and trusting people naïve about fake medicine people are at risk of being violated.

Although it is unpleasant to speak on such issues, particularly around Native sweat lodge ceremonies, the alternative of remaining silent serves only to foster a culture of Spiritual Elites and to continue a cycle of abuse. A sweat lodge leader is not a spiritual elite but someone who has trained to lead participants in lodge ceremonies. The lodge holder has learned about the powers of the spirit world and how to guide others through the process. All participants including the leader are considered equal. However, there are leaders and participants that have forgotten (or do not know) the fundamental natural law of respect and humility to the supreme powers of the spirit world. In the words of Wells (1994:55), “the irony is that those who worship idols become as dead as the idols they worship, and those who inflame themselves in worship of them are consumed by the fires of divine judgment.” Thus, those who place themselves above Spirit not only pirate

the spirit of others, but fail to recognize that they have pirated their own spirit, lost in an abyss of spiritual fragmentation.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

### Introduction

This chapter draws the thesis to a close. Four pivotal pieces of information that build up to the concept of Spirit Piracy are briefly reviewed. These four pieces include: the fundamental belief system of Native spirituality; a Cree three (four)-tiered universe / spiritual paradigm; the cycle of spiritual fragmentation; and the Native sweat lodge. Following this review is the concluding theory that the “spirit of colonialism” has entered the lodge—the main reason being that modernity based in colonial constructs have altered traditional Native sweat lodge ceremonies. This theory is arrived at from the collection of interviews, which also are supported by the literature review. As the Native sweat lodge is a natural resource bearing witness to the emotionality (emotional energy) of the universe confirms our interconnectedness to a greater spiritual force that exists beyond us. Concluding this chapter are ideas on how Spirit Piracy has a broad application and is applicable to numerous disciplines—mental health, environmental design, cultural and heritage studies, religious studies, and development studies—to mention a few.

We begin with the fundamental belief system of Native spirituality. The belief is that a Supreme Being or Sacred Energy Force created the entire universe and all that is in it. This Supreme Being or Energy is known by numerous names such as the Great Manito, Wakan Takan, the Creator, and Great Spirit—the name varies depending on Indigenous groups. At the time of creation, a sacred energy was imbued in all of creation. We are therefore interconnected by this sacred energy; hence, the phrase, “all

my relations.” What’s more, this sacred energy becomes a spirit embodied in every part of creation with an assigned purpose and task to its existence.

Second, there is an Indigenous spiritual paradigm—the Cree three-tiered universe belief system where the lower level belongs to the physical realm where human beings and all sacred organisms reside; the middle level is home to ancestral spirits; and the highest level that of animal spirits (such as the Thunderbird) and the Creator Spirit. In research conducted by Mandelbaum (1979:302), he reports that among the Cree, some believe that there is a fourth level that includes the underworld, while some Cree report that there is no multi-tiered universe. In the case of the latter, I would suspect that they do not lead sweat lodges or do so solely for the purpose of purification that removes toxins from the body. Again, as Indigenous belief systems see the physical and spiritual world as one, there is no need to see it as multi-tiered. For the purpose of this research, the three (or four) tiered universe system is used to demonstrate that while all levels interact with each other simultaneously, they do not exchange order, as the three-tiered universe is a fixed natural order. Therefore, humans remain on the lower level, never to be equal to or above the Creator/Great Spirit.

We now turn to the “cycle of spiritual fragmentation,” which contains three parts. First, the fundamental of Native spirituality (Sacred Energy); second is the “Roots of spiritual fragmentation” (the divine imperative, scientific experiment, and colonization/colonialism); and third is the act of Spirit Piracy which is the pirating of the sacred energy imbued in all creation. The cycle of spiritual fragmentation was outlined in chapter 2. What is observed in this cycle is a pattern of wounding the sacred energy that exists in all of creation. This wounding continues because humans have rationalized

their superiority to the natural world. Thus, when the spirit of people, places, and things is misappropriated, negated, or wounded, a pirating of its embodied spirit occurs. The repeating cycle of spiritual fragmentation forces the human spirit to move or separate from the greater spirituality of the universe.

The fourth piece is the Native sweat lodge ceremony. The lodge is a place of prayer where spiritual communication between the physical and spirit world is amplified. This ceremony is ancient and is guided by protocols based in natural laws. The Native sweat lodge is used for purification purposes, spiritual renewal and healing, and to communicate with the spirit world.

All of these four pieces make-up the structural framework for which the concept of Spirit Piracy is built on. The belief system of Native spirituality is fundamental to grasping how every part of creation is interconnected by a sacred energy. It is this that the fundamental concept of Spirit Piracy returns to. Again, when the “embodied spirit” within any part of the natural world is wounded, it reverberates throughout the entire universe just as in the analogy of pulling and releasing a strand of a spider’s web. Thus, awareness of the impact humans have through their actions and even thoughts is critical in arresting Spirit Piracy. As stated numerous times throughout the thesis, *Spirit Piracy* refers to the pirating of Spirit within people, places, and things.

### **8.1 The “spirit of colonialism” has entered the lodge**

The evidence gathered from interview participants and supported by the literature review indicates that there is a social phenomenon happening around the traditional Native sweat lodge ceremony. At the heart of the problem is an age-old process of spiritual

fragmentation. Although spiritual fragmentation has occurred throughout all centuries, I have taken a snapshot in time that includes the divine imperative, the scientific experiment, and colonization/colonialism to explore pivotal points in history that collectively act to further this fragmentary process.<sup>53</sup> The continued process of inverting the natural order (as described in the Cree three-tiered universe) serves to distance, weaken, and move the human spirit from the sacred. It is as though the human's intuitive and spiritual senses are dulled incapable of hearing rocks when they speak or feeling the sacred energy that is shared by all. Therefore, prayer is used to renew and strengthen our communication with the spirit world through ceremony. The problem facing society today is that the pattern of fragmentation is seared into our consciousness making it increasingly difficult to break out of, even when there is awareness of this inner struggle.

The history of colonialism is at the centre of the opposing Western and Native worldviews in economics, religion, and politics. With the arrival of Europeans to Canada came colonial ideologies, government policies, and Christian-based faith religions that sought to supplant Native ways of life (Wilson 2004: 359-361). Forced removal from ancestral lands stopped access to traditional hunting grounds, gathering of medicinal plants, and visits to sacred sites and places for fasting and vision quests. How this created a rupture in the transmission of sacred knowledge is that rituals for buffalo hunts, gathering of sweetgrass, and visiting petroglyphs meant a disruption in experiential learning from hearing origin stories and visually connecting it to land marks. Stories

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<sup>53</sup> The words colonization and colonialism are used as an umbrella that includes the scientific experiment and the divine imperative referring to the continuous process of spiritual fragmentation.

about the sacred interconnection between humans and land, plants and animals have greater impact when a person can actually visit such sacred places as the Buffalo Gap, Sweetgrass Hills, or Big Horn Medicine Wheel. Similarly, as Manitopyes (2008) states, “the Cree used to leave the frame of the sweat lodge standing as a memorial of something spiritually significant that took place there.”

The interview participants agreed that government policies that removed Natives from their homelands, banned ceremonial practices (1884-1951), and forced children into residential school systems were the root causes to the rupture in the transmission of traditional knowledge. The effects of colonialism on the survivors of residential/boarding schools were felt deep within families as children suffered various abuses: abandonment, physical, mental, emotional, sexual, and spiritual. Long separations between children and their parents and grandparents instilled a deep sense of loneliness, spiritual deprivation referred to as the “soul wound”—“a trauma that has occurred in the soul or spirit” (Duran 2006:7). Duran (2006) goes on to say that,

Manifestation of the internalized soul wound is found in many facets of life, such as domestic violence, suicide, family dysfunction, community dysfunction and violence, institutional violence and dysfunction, tribal/political infighting and violence, spiritual abuse and violence, and epistemic violence...Internalized oppression is a wound that, like a vampire bite, becomes embedded as the individual or group is undergoing the abuse or trauma. Unless the victim is able to consciously explore the dynamics of the abuse and find meaning in the situation, that individual is doomed to repeat the abuse on someone or something else. (Duran 2006:22-23).

As Native peoples began to heal from painful experiences in residential schools, a resurgence of interest in Native culture, customs, and spirituality emerged. This began in



the 1970's and simultaneously brought forth "Born Again Elders/Indian" and self-appointed elders (Lightning 2008). Shortly thereafter, the 1980's New Age culture also gave rise to numerous White "Plastic men and women" (Donaldson 1999:267) and "Shake and Bake Shamans" (Aldred 2000:331). A White woman told Bucko (1999:230) that, "New Age people are reincarnated Indians."

Many Native people have now gone to New Age books and Internet sites to learn about their own culture, rather than going through the years of training to learn about protocols and ceremony (Manitopyes 2008). Born Again Elders and Plastic Shamans imitate, copy, and make up protocols as they go. Both alter traditional teachings to suit their own interests and commodify the sacred for financial gain or personal fame. "Commodification is about compartmentalization. It is positivistic and technological" (Smith 2000:218). Another group identified by interview participants were the "Spiritual Elites." They are people who misuse their spiritual knowledge to abuse vulnerable people and/or have placed themselves above or equal to the Creator spirit—they are lost in the abyss of spiritual fragmentation (Tsuu T'ina elder 2007).

As Lerat (2007) watches from the outside of the sweat lodge, he observes the collapse of Western and Native worldviews. He shakes his head when he sees people show up with elaborate pipes and perfectly machine beaded pipe bags, fancy decorated eagle fans, and ceremonial items they haven't earned. Society wants "instant spirituality" and if someone is willing to buy it someone is willing to sell it (Lightning 2008). So we see people with a very short amount of time in sweat lodges rapidly acquiring pipes, eagle fans, eagle bone whistles, and medicine bags—they are in a hurry to acquire their

spirituality, but this is not practicing Native spirituality. In the words of Castellano (2000),

In recent years there has been a great increase in the number of young aboriginal people seeking out elders to acquire knowledge, including knowledge about ceremonials and medicine – the use of spiritual power. While much of what is taught focuses on personal transformation and self-discipline, the possibility exists that even this knowledge can be used for self-serving ends. One hear cautionary tales of novices in medicine ways who failed to demonstrate proper respect for the knowledge that had been entrusted to them, and who came to a bad end, usually through accidents. (Castellano 2000:26-27).

Those who have been involved in sweat lodge ceremonies know that it takes a minimum of 12-15 years of training from qualified, reputable elders before a person is ready to take on a leadership role. What we are witnessing in sweat lodge ceremonies today are neo-native and neo-colonial behaviours that suggest modernity has changed tradition.

More alarming is, “the legacy of this colonizing objective is frequently parroted by Indigenous Peoples, even by some academics, who have obediently learned to restrict their own vision according to the parameters set for us by our colonizers” (Wilson 2004: 361). “Taking-over” Native culture and spiritual ceremonies is actually normalized through a mindset that colonization is the “right” way to do things. There is an underlying complicity about colonialism that justifies suppressing Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies. Stories about sexual abuse in lodges or former prisoners hired on as “Elders” who have inmates whip the sweat lodge to release pent up anger are extremely disturbing as these behaviours do not reflect the an understanding of the sweat lodge. For these reasons mentioned, I conclude that the “spirit of colonialism” has entered the sweat lodge.

In the words of Northern Lights Boy (2008), “modernity has altered traditional ways of ceremony—it is the people who are abusing the Sun Dance and the Sweat Lodge.” The Native interviewees in this research described numerous protocols of the sweat lodge based in the laws of the natural world and spoke on the violation of such. The non-Native interviewee disagreed with the theory that Spirit Piracy is taking place, stating that any attempt at moving a person spiritually forward is good, regardless of how people use the sweat lodge. However, he did state that a person who misappropriates the Native sweat lodge ceremony would face consequences, but did not name them. He stated that spirituality is in the individual and not “in the cathedral.” All Native research interviewees shared in the belief that there are serious consequences to “playing around with spirits”—either to the person doing the violation or that harm would come to his or her family. Lightning (2008) states that as a consequence to violating natural laws, these consequences can be carried forward to subsequent future generations.

Any form of abuse whether sexual or cultural terrorism within sweat lodges is a violation of traditional Native values—it pirates the spirit of the lodge, the participants, the leaders, the rocks, water, medicines, and items used in the ceremony. This is about personal ego and power that has nothing to do with spirituality. To ensure the survival of Native traditional ceremonies such as the sweat lodge, leaders and participants must examine their own consciousnesses of internalized colonization.

The purpose of the sweat lodge ceremony is to purify and heal the human being. Heat produced when water is splashed on the hot rocks is said to soften hardened hearts wounded by life’s tragedies, histories of cultural genocide, and spiritual deprivation and fragmentation.

*Just for an instance, they took us to residential schools and knocked the crap out of us, our heritage, our beliefs, our traditional ways, they knocked that out of us. And now what they done before to the Native—their beliefs and ceremonies survived. They'll [the Natives] will always survive (Lerat 2007).*

The deep-rooted pain caused by family separation and various forms of abuses (physical, emotional, sexual, mental, and spiritual) during the residential school era remains in the hearts of many Native peoples. Lerat speaks of forgiveness, but the deep wounds caused by cultural genocide have not been forgotten.

One of the reasons for exposing the social phenomenon of Spirit Piracy is to heal a spiritual wound. The process of healing requires that elders and sweat lodge participants search their own souls to observe how colonization has impacted their own lives. As younger generations follow the teachings of elders in sweat lodge ceremonies, we need them to be healthy. Likewise, participants must adhere to protocols in and around the ceremony. As the sweat lodge is a natural resource, it must be protected to ensure that our cultural heritage survives.

## **8.2 Bearing witness to the emotionality of the universe**

I wish to conclude this chapter with remembering why it is that we go to sweat lodge ceremonies. The sweat lodge is a ceremony where participants bear witness to the emotionality of the universe in tangible forms we can understand. When we bear witness to blue spirit lights and sparks, feel the flap of an eagle wing, or hear the crack of thunder from the thunderbird inside the lodge—we are forever changed as proof that the sacred lives among us. Henderson (2006:135) reminds us that, “the environment and its life forms are embodied spirits ... Each animal, tree, or plant is a marvellous embodiment of

subtle spirits with whom a human can, with great discipline and effort, gain communication in the different realms.” In the words of Hogan (1992:34-35), she describes the sweat lodge ceremony as, “...the entire world is brought inside...by the end of the ceremony, it is as if skin contains land and birds.” Again, bearing witness to the mystery of life is life changing, healing, and confirms that we are not alone.

### **8.3 The concept of Spirit Piracy has a broad application**

The concept of Spirit Piracy in this research reaches beyond the sweat lodge, which is why it has a broad application. Returning to the fundamental thesis statement, as the Creator imbued the same sacred life force energy into all aspects of creation—to wound “embodied spirits” is to wound ourselves. Thus, Spirit Piracy is applicable to mental health issues, environmental development projects, and cultural and heritage studies—just to name a few.

Spirit Piracy is applicable to environmental development projects because (in most cases) the spirit of land, water, and air is not considered prior to development. Were planners able to see all forms of natural resources as possessing “embodied spirits,” awareness of human interconnectedness to the environment would increase, while exploitation for capitalistic reasons alone would decrease? When the steel teeth of a backhoe gouges at the earth without thought or consideration for the spirit of the land—this is Spirit Piracy. The same can be said for toxic chemicals spilled into the oceans or toxins released into the atmosphere.

The concept of Spirit Piracy can be applied to mental health issues such as suicide or to various types of abuses (emotional, physical, spiritual, mental, sexual)—a person

pirates his or her own spirit, or that of others, by harming the individual spirit within. Causing personal death or wounding the “embodied spirit” of another person results in dislodging the spirit from that of the source of life.

Similarly, Spirit Piracy applies to drug and alcohol addictions. Research shows that alcohol and drugs has a destructive spirit (Duran 2006:66-74). The spirit within alcohol and drugs works in two ways. It either causes the human spirit to move out of its human body or holds the human spirit hostage within incapable of travelling outside its body. Either way, the spirit of these substances pirates the spirit of the human until the effects of the alcohol or drug can wear off.

Animal cruelty is to cause harm to an animal’s spirit. Like humans, animals have spirits each with its own purpose for living and a duty to perform tasks as deemed by the Creator spirit. As part of the Divine Imperative, animals have an inherent right to life and a right to procreate. When humans harm animals, this type of Spirit Piracy denies an animal’s inherent right to life.

Spirit Piracy also is pertinent to the repatriation of human remains and ceremonial items of Aboriginal peoples. Human remains removed from gravesites and placed in museums around the world in the 1900’s are now being repatriated (NAGPRA 1990). Bones retain spirit in their DNA. Bringing home the spirits of the ancestors means healing a spiritual wound. This is witnessed in McMahon’s (2004) film *Stolen Spirits of Haida Gwaii* when 160 remains are reclaimed from the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, Illinois. Ancestral bones were not only removed from their living families, but also from their stories of origin contained in land and plants and animals of the same ecosystems. Wherever a person is born, a part of that natural environment is carried

within the individual's spirit. Thus, to dislodge a body from its place of rest is to pirate the spirit of the bones, the ancestors of a community, and remove a part of the natural environment.

Protection of sacred sites, petroglyphs, and biomedicines also relate to spirituality. Sacred sites are places of worship or commemorate spiritual events that have taken place there (Deloria 2004:83). Petroglyphs such as those at Writing-On-Stone, Milk River, Alberta are historical records. It is said that the spirits continue to carve new image on the stones today. Where petroglyphs in any location are destroyed this pirates the spirit of the rock and interferes with the transmission of knowledge from the past to the present and future generations.

Biomedicines are particularly important to humans as we ingest plants to heal our bodies. However, large pharmaceutical companies extract the chemical compounds from plants for their medicinal purposes but forget about the spirit of the plant that is meant to heal the spirit of the human being. Thus, this is an example of Spirit Piracy of the plant. Arguments in literature also indicate that the act of removing a plant from one geographical area to another can be a form of Spirit Piracy as the spirit of the plant is forcibly relocated from its place of origin and related plants, while the "transplants" are given chemicals and fertilizers to force them to grow against their natural cycle.

Needless to say, the list of how Spirit Piracy can be applied to all academic disciplines is extensive. Pirating the spirit of thought, stories, the land, water, and so on is to pirate our own spirit. Therefore, Spirit Piracy is the human violation of natural laws—it pirates the spirit within people, places, and things. When the deep wounding and the effects of Spirit Piracy is realized, even for a moment, it is enough to shift the

human consciousness to refocus to the original instructions as set by the Creator Spirit as outlined in the Indigenous/Cree three-tiered universe.



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## APPENDIX A: ON RESEARCH ETHICS AND PROTOCOLS

1. The importance of following proper ethics and protocols is paramount for academic institutions, Native communities (particularly in ceremonies), and as a researcher. It is a critical component of research methodology. The University of Calgary's Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) requires that students, faculty, and staff members gain ethics clearance prior to conducting research on human subjects. The receipt of an Ethics Certificate is required in the final defence of a master's or doctoral thesis. Similarly, proper ethics and protocols are critical in Native communities especially around all ceremonies. The Native sweat lodge ceremony is governed by protocols set by the individual leading the ceremony. A Native researcher is held accountable to a third standard of ethics, that of the self, as participating in both worlds of academia and the community. Adhering to proper ethics and protocols builds a foundation based in accountability, trust, and transparency.

2. Although it is not common practice from the University's standpoint, it is protocol when conducting research in Native communities to offer a participant the opportunity to review their submission before it is included in the final draft of a paper. Interestingly enough, I recently heard of a case where an elder was offended to be asked to review her submission stating that she had already given her permission to use any part of what she had given in an interview. As researchers we are continuously learning about protocols and interpretations.

**APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM**

CONJOINT FACULTIES RESEARCH  
ETHICS BOARD

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**APPLICATION FOR ETHICS REVIEW**  
**Research Services, ERRB Building, Research Park**

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**Name of Researcher, Faculty, Department, Telephone & Email:**

Line Laplante, Faculty of Graduate Studies, Department of Interdisciplinary Graduate Program, (403) 276-7716, lpare@ucalgary.ca

**Supervisor:**

Dr. Jim Frideres, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology; International Indigenous Studies, Program Head, (403-220-5521), frideres@ucalgary.ca

**Title of Project:**

Native Spirituality: Spirit Piracy and Native Sweat Lodges

**Sponsor:**

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)

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This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

The University of Calgary Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board has approved this research study.

**Purpose of the Study:**

The purpose of this study is to listen to what Native elders and non-Native people are saying about social changes occurring around Native sweat lodge ceremonies in the Calgary area. I am specifically interested in their views on how activities of non-Native and Native complicity, New Agers, and “White guilt” sufferers impact Native spiritual heritage and contributes to “Spirit Piracy” (a term I have coined) as a form of cultural exploitation. I wish to learn about protocols being set to protect sweat lodge ceremonies from neo-colonialism; also how New Agers and “White guilt” sufferers understand their

location in relation to this sacred ceremony and the cultural continuity of the Native community.

Participants are chosen for three reasons: 1) they are reputable elders and educators that I know who conduct traditional sweat lodge ceremonies; 2) are familiar with urban/social changes occurring in Calgary; and 3) have personal knowledge and experience with New Age practices or claim to suffer from ‘White guilt’ and are involved with either the Native community or participate in Native spiritual ceremonies.

### **What Will I Be Asked To Do?**

Participants are asked to speak candidly in response to the study topic (as mentioned above and in the “explanation of the study”). I will be the sole interviewer and request that I am allowed to use a tape recorder during the interview. Tape recording is not a necessary condition for participation in the study, it simply allows for a more fluid conversation without the interruption of note taking. There is no set length time limit for our interview; however I will offer the opportunity for participants to think about the research topic for one week prior to our interview. ‘Spirit’ will direct the length of our conversation. Segments of the written transcription of our conversation used in the final thesis will be reviewed with individual participants for final verification; the participant will have 2 weeks to make changes if they wish. If I have not heard from the participant after the 2-week period, I will assume that there are no changes to be made. From the University’s ethics standpoint, it is not necessary to offer participants the option of a final review; however it is common practice and standard protocol when working in Aboriginal communities, particularly with Aboriginal elders, that they be given the opportunity to verify their submissions – this option will be available to non-Native interviewees as well. Participation is voluntary. An individual may refuse to participate altogether, in answering certain parts, and/or may withdraw from the study at any time.

### **What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?**

Participants are encouraged to use their own names and Nation of origin to empower the Aboriginal voice, but may choose to remain anonymous, or use a pseudonym instead. There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:

I grant permission to be audio taped: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

I wish to remain anonymous: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

The pseudonym I choose for myself is: \_\_\_\_\_

You may quote me and use my name: Yes: \_\_\_ No: \_\_\_

### **Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?**

This research has no risks to the participant. As is protocol with Native elders in the Calgary area, when tobacco is accepted by an elder/participant (this signals an agreement to work together). I will provide an honorarium of \$75.00 to each participant, including non-Native people (at the end of the interview), and lastly I will offer a small gift (at the end of the project when participants review the parts of our interview that I will include in my thesis). The \$75 honorarium is a one-time occurrence.

### **Provision for Rescue:**

Although I do not foresee any risks to this research, a provision of rescue mechanism is in place whereby an elder or participant can contact Dr. James Frideres for support and/or debriefing. There is no cost to the individual for this service.

### **What Happens to the Information I Provide?**

The information you provide will be kept in a locked cabinet (in my home) only accessible by the researcher and available to my supervisor, Dr. Jim Frideres, and Drs. Wisdom Tettey and Anne White (committee members) if requested. If a participant withdraws from the study, the collected data will either be destroyed or used on the consent of the participants. The Faculty of Social Work guidelines stipulate that final research data must be kept for a period of 5 years after completion of the research project; after this time the data will be permanently destroyed.

### **Signatures (written consent)**

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Questions/Concerns**

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

*Ms. Line Laplante*

*Faculty of Graduate Studies, Interdisciplinary Graduate Program*

*(403-276-7716), [lpare@ucalgary.ca](mailto:lpare@ucalgary.ca)*

*And Dr. Jim Frideres, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Sociology;*

*International Indigenous Studies, Program Head,*

*(403-220-5521), [frideres@ucalgary.ca](mailto:frideres@ucalgary.ca)*

If you have any concerns about the way you've been treated as a participant, please contact Bonnie Scherrer, Ethics Resource Officer, Research Services Office, University of Calgary at (403) 220-3782; email [bonnie.scherrer@ucalgary.ca](mailto:bonnie.scherrer@ucalgary.ca). A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.