

Accompaniment: Psychosocial, Environmental, Trans-Species, Earthⁱ

Mary Watkins

Abstract

This essay advocates for a paradigm shift in psychology toward the activity and ethics of accompaniment (psychosocial, environmental, trans-species, and earth). These interrelated types of accompaniment require a reorientation of the subjectivity, the interpersonal practices, and the critical understanding of the accompanier so that (s)he can stand alongside others who desire listening, witnessing, advocacy, space to develop critical inquiry and research, and joint action to address desired and needed changes.

The idea of “accompaniment” emerged in liberation theology in Latin America, and then migrated into liberatory forms of psychology as “psychosocial accompaniment.” This essay explores accompaniment and its ethics from a phenomenological perspective, highlighting differences from more mainstream stances in psychology. Attention is also given to the effects of accompaniment on the accompanier.

Efforts to decolonize psychology require careful attention to the psychic decolonization of its practitioners and to the cultivation of decolonizing interpersonal practices that provide a relational and ethical foundation for joint research, restorative healing, and transformative action. Such practices endeavor through dialogue to build mutual respect and understanding, effective solidarity, and contribute to the empowerment of those marginalized. The decolonization of psychology should enable practitioners to be more effective in working for

increased social, economic, and environmental justice, peace building and reconciliation,ⁱⁱ and local and globalⁱⁱⁱ ecological sustainability. Examples of psychosocial and environmental accompaniment that contribute to these goals are shared here.

“To Walk in the Company” of Others

[W]hat we want is to walk in the company of man, every man, night and day, for all times.

Frantz Fanon, 2004, p. 238

On the eve of the Algerian Revolution, Caribbean born and French educated psychiatrist Franz Fanon became the medical chief of the French Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria. There he intimately encountered the colonial nature of psychiatry. Each day he struggled to treat both Algerian resisters of colonialism who suffered from the aftermath of torture at the hands of French forces and French military and police perpetrators of such torture. The psychiatry he was being asked to perform aimed to patch up psychic wounds incurred in struggles for resistance and domination, without clarifying and fighting against the system of violent oppression that was producing enormous emotional and social suffering in an entire subjugated and occupied population. His conscience demanded that he act to remove the causes of his patients' suffering, which he believed stemmed from the violent colonial domination of the native Algerian population by French forces. To more directly “treat” these causes, he resigned his post at the hospital, and turned his fuller attention to revolutionary action. He delivered a searing letter of resignation that denounced

the French colonial powers' "abortive attempt to decerebralize a people" (1967b, p. 53).

If psychiatry is the medical technique which sets out to enable people to relate to their environment, then I have to state that the Arabs, because they are permanently alienated in their own country, live in a state of total depersonalization. (1967b, p. 53).

Before his untimely death he wrote in *Wretched of the Earth* (2004) that "we need a model, schemas, and examples" different from the ones we have inherited from Europe and America, models that will allow us to join in "projects and collaboration with others on tasks that strengthen man's totality" (p. 236). He urged us to "make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man" (p. 239). "[W]hat we want," he said, "is to walk in the company of man, every man, night and day, for all times" (2004, p. 238); to claim the "open door" available in our consciousness so that the "possibility of love" can emerge (1967a, pp. 332, 42).

Liberation psychology offers us a language to describe the role that Fanon carved out for himself with respect to the Algerian people: "psychosocial accompaniment." It is a far cry from the colonizing practices and modes of relation embedded within mainstream U.S. psychology, evident in approaches to both psychological research and clinical work. In the former, too often psychological researchers fail to adequately socially and historically contextualize the subject matter of their inquiry, falling back on personalistic approaches; they may sidestep engaging as co-researchers the members of the community they have decided are the participants of their research; too often inadequate attention is given to maximizing the potential that their research

findings will have potential catalytic liberatory power, and to taking the steps to close the loop between insight and transformative action. Instead, research agendas are often generated apart from the relevant community, and community members are positioned as the objects of research instead of respected and empowered co-creators who identify the needed foci of research, and who engage in research as an effort of participatory reflection and transformative action. Too often clinical practices in the U.S. are collusive with the greed that has fueled the corporatization and privatization of healthcare, with the U.S. military's practices of torture, and with the obscuring of the psychological effects of pernicious social conditions through cleaving to a false and obfuscating paradigm of individualism. Psychosocial accompaniment counters the "cultural invasion" (Freire, 2000) of exporting to places around the world diagnoses and treatment interventions that should not be universalized and imposed from positions of cultural supremacy (Nickerson, 2014).

As the nature and impacts of collective trauma have become increasingly apparent, the North American clinical paradigm—that was developed without sufficient regard for psychosocial traumas-- shows its limitations. Instead of adequately clarifying the disorders in the world that have impinged on individuals' and communities' well-being, the dominant clinical paradigm has been more concerned with medicalized diagnosis, individualized treatment protocols, pharmaceutical interventions, and "evidence-based practices." In doing so, it has colluded with the dictates of corporatized healthcare, and largely sidestepped the issue of how to transform status quo societal arrangements that generate psychological suffering from collective traumas.

Meanwhile epidemiological studies have clearly revealed the impact of

collective or social trauma on the increased incidence of psychopathology, both in the U.S. and elsewhere: poverty (in particular when in societies with wide income divides), high population mobility, family fragmentation, class inequities, poor and inadequate housing, mis-education, gender inequities, racism, homophobia, torture, rapid social change and social disintegration, war, genocide, forced migration, chronic unemployment, failures of social and community support structures (Kleinman, 1988). The fact that "most mental disorders have their highest prevalence rates in the lowest socioeconomic class" (Kleinman, 1988, p. 54), where there is least access to security, resources, adequate food and housing, and healthcare, gives added weight to liberation psychologies' "preferential option for the poor." The very construction of the concept of "mental disorder" often contributes to a serious misreading of social conditions as personal problems (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

This approach does not deny a biological basis for some forms of mental illness. Instead it embeds the biological paradigm itself into the more encompassing paradigm of accompaniment. In the case of schizophrenia, for example, outcome is sharply dependent on the sociocultural factors that contribute to whether or not one enjoys adequate accompaniment and support (i.e., is one surrounded by family and friends, helped to work and contribute, and does one have access to a safe supportive place to be during the most challenging periods of one's illness).

For both researchers and clinicians, moving toward accompaniment requires both psychic and social decolonization, and a shedding of professionalized roles that proceed from a sense of expertism and excess power and are too often oriented toward professional aggrandizement. This paper is an

effort to phenomenologically describe accompaniment (psychosocial, trans-species, and environmental) and to advocate for our seeing it as a potential role for psychologically-minded people so that we can practice walking “in the company of others,” as Fanon (2004, p. 238) suggested. It responds to Fanon’s call for “a model, schemas, and examples” in an effort to enrich our imagination about the kinds of decolonizing work that are needed (2004, p. 236).

Many conditions in the U.S. cry out for more liberatory forms of psychology—that is, for practices of psychosocial and ecological accompaniment. Consider, for example, the U.S.’ proliferation of poverty (i.e., 46.5 million live below the poverty line), and a historic widening abyss between the rich and the poor with the top 10% of households controlling 50.4% of family income; continual involvement in wars and other forms of spiraling violence, such as gun violence, torture practices, and violence against prisoners and detainees; continuing racism including disproportionately high rates of incarceration of peoples of color and a proliferation of detention centers for forced migrants and refugees; failure to adequately address the needs and rights of indigenous groups who survived the genocide; the unconscionably excess use of fossil fuels in the context of climate change; the sickening of the water and land through the use of herbicides and pesticides and other large scale agribusiness practices. The attention of U.S. psychologists to areas of the world ravished by colonialism’s hunger for natural resources and cheap labor and its use of violence to satisfy these hungers, must be shared with the internal colonies that are dotted throughout the fabric of the U.S. (Allen, 2005). These zones of abandonment (Biehl, 2005) and sacrifice (Hedges & Sacco, 2012) replicate the patterns of resource extraction, labor abuse, and violence found abroad, showing that the

forces of transnational globalization show no mercy. They are more than willing to consume or exploit any body of which they are a part, a kind of self-cannibalism that is only imaginable when radical individualism with its short-term focus is an unconscious and unquestioned ideology that dictates all practices.

To critically understand the psychologies into which I was born in the United States, I have tried to learn from psychologies from the South and from indigenous societies in both my own country and elsewhere. I am indebted and grateful to these tributaries of knowledge and understanding (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Accompaniment is more widely practiced by social psychologists and liberation psychologists from the South and by many indigenous societies, even if not named as such. “Accompaniment” is rarely mentioned in the U.S., where the humility is most needed—in both the domestic and international work of U.S. psychologists. Many of the issues I broach may have relevance for other “First World” countries who export their psychological paradigms and practices to societies still caught in the vortex of colonialism and its morphs into neoliberal globalization.

Psychosocial Accompaniment

Accompaniment: to deviate from other pathways for a while (and then forever), to walk with those on the margins, to be with them, to let go. Accompaniment is an idea so radical and difficult for us to comprehend that its power and significance reveal themselves to our Western and Northern minds only slowly and with great difficulty.

Dennis & Moe-Lobeda, 1993, p. 21

“Accompaniment” is a term currently used in social medicine, peace activism, human rights, pastoral support, and social and liberation psychology.^{iv} The concept is used when speaking of accompanying the ill who are also poor (Farmer, 2011), those caught in prison and detention systems (Lykes, Hershberg & Brabeck, 2011; Ragbir, *New Sanctuary Coalition*), political dissidents (Romero, 2001), refugees (*Jesuit Refugee Service*), those suffering occupation (*Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine*), victims of torture and other forms of violence, those forcibly displaced (Sacipa, Vidales, Galindo & Tovar, 2007), those suffering from human rights violations (Mahoney & Eguren, 1997), and those attempting to live peacefully in the face of paramilitary and military violence (such as the peace communities in Colombia, see *Fellowship for Reconciliation*, N.D.). In Latin America, “psychosocial accompaniment” has arisen as a role that is distinct from that of psychotherapist or psychological researcher, though it may include elements of each.

The root of *acompañamiento* is *compañero* or friend (Goizueta, 1995). It draws from the Latin *ad cum panis*, to break bread with one another. Dr. Paul Farmer (2011, 2013) is the founder of *Partners in Health* and is an internationally renowned innovator of social medicine that creates systems of medical care for the poor that have been previously reserved only for the affluent. He has placed accompaniment as the “cornerstone” of his practice.

To accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end. There's an element of mystery, of openness, of trust, in accompaniment. The companion, the *accompagneur*, says: “I'll go with

you and support you on your journey wherever it leads. I'll share your fate for a while-- and by "a while," I don't mean a little while.

Accompaniment is about sticking with a task until it's deemed completed --not by the *accompagnateur*, but by the person being accompanied.

(Farmer, 2103, p. 234)

Accompaniment often, though not exclusively, occurs in communities that are struggling with various collective traumas, including poverty. Liberation theologian Roberto Goizueta (2009) describes how the accompanier needs to forego his usual safe enclosure apart from those in need: "To 'opt for the poor' is thus to place ourselves *there*, to accompany the poor person in his or her life, death, and struggle for survival" (p. 192).

As a society, we are happy to help and serve the poor, as long as we don't have to walk *with* them where they walk, that is, as long as we can minister to them from our safe enclosures. The poor can then remain passive objects of our actions, rather than friends, *compañeros* and *compañeras* with whom we interact. As long as we can be sure that we will not have to live with them, and thus have interpersonal relationships with them... we will try to help 'the poor'—but, again, only from a controllable, geographical distance. (p. 199)

Farmer and Goizueta underline that accompaniment requires time and commitment, as well as placing oneself alongside the accompanied.

While keeping company on the journey, the accompanier—depending on the needs and desires of those accompanied—may provide individual and community witness and support, solidarity in relevant social movements, assistance with networking with communities at a distance suffering similar

conditions, research on needed dimensions, and participation in educating civil society about the difficulties suffered and the changes needed to relieve this suffering. Liberation psychologists Edge, Kagan & Stewart (2003) draw from the human rights and development fields to characterize the process of accompaniment as involving an invited relationship that becomes close and continuous, and is based on dialogue. It involves listening, witnessing, and the offering of specific, flexible, and strategic support. They are clear that accompaniment demands our capacity and willingness to experience the pain and struggle of those we accompany, and that we need to refrain from strategizing on behalf of those accompanied, proposing solutions to their problems, instead of listening intently to *their* emergent strategies.

Psychosocial accompaniment involves prophetic imagination, what liberation pedagogist Paulo Freire (2000) called “annunciation.” Around the particular issue or situation where one is accompanying there is a vision--latent or manifest—of how the situation could be “otherwise.” This vision can guide and inspire, serving to widen circles of solidarity, and to discern “right” action. Father Gutiérrez clarifies that the “poverty of the poor is not a call to generous relief action, but a demand that we go and build a different social order” (1983, p. 45). It is a demand not for development, but for liberation (1983, p. 44).^v The practice of psychosocial accompaniment should be inexorably linked to this demand and desire.

For this reason, the lifestyle of the psychologist must also be susceptible to critique in terms of seeing clearly how it contributes to inequities and injustices. While as professional psychologists or human services providers we are used to thematizing the effects of our professional actions on others, the horizontality of

accompaniment requires that we bring into sharper focus the effects of being alongside on each partner, the accompanied and the accompanier, including insights into the seeds and invasive weeds of coloniality (Quijano, 2000) in one's thinking and behaving.

Psychosocial accompaniment often involves research and other conscientizing efforts with others to construct "liberating knowledge" (Sacipa-Rodríguez, Tovar-Guerra, Galindo-Villareal & Vidales-Bohórquez, 2009, p. 222), knowledge that will assist in transforming status quo arrangements that undermine the integrity of body and mind, relations between self and other, and between one community and another. Paul Farmer (2011) uses the word accompaniment to describe *Partners in Health's* approach to the intersection of global poverty with disease. He stresses that real service to the poor must involve *both* listening to the poor *and* developing an understanding of global poverty; i.e., not only a structural analysis but an analysis that is linked with the affective significance of actual experiences of living poverty. The understanding that comes from these relational efforts are needed to power and steer efforts to end poverty. For Farmer research divorced from relationships of accompaniment will fall short of the understandings needed for increased health equity.

Psychosocial accompaniment as a practice is rooted in an interdependent understanding of psychological and community well-being, not in an individualistic paradigm of psychological suffering. The one who accompanies holds the individual's suffering and well-being in the light of the sociocultural and historical context, making conscientization (critical consciousness) (Freire, 2000) the cornerstone of the practice. Insofar as psychological and community symptoms memorialize violations that have occurred, the one who accompanies

is also a witness. This witnessing is a particularly crucial antidote when the events or conditions suffered have been repressed or denied by the wider culture. The creation of opportunities for testimony enables those who have suffered violence and social exclusion to exercise their agency and to bring their experience into the public arena to be acknowledged and witnessed. Such opportunities for testimony may help to restore or strengthen self-respect and a sense of oneself as an agent (Oliver, 2001), in addition to educating a wider public about needed changes.

For instance, in the city I live in, Santa Barbara, California, all political, economic, and social power was held by Mexicans prior to 1848. In the thirty years after the Mexican-American War, this political, economic, and social power was wrested away from Mexicans and assumed by incoming Anglos. Mexicans and Mexican Americans were segregated into ever smaller areas where the quality of life was reduced by overcrowding, increasing poverty, and disease. Men were deprived of their traditional professions. Due to declining family income, women were forced to work outside the home for the first time, and shortly, thereafter they were joined by their children in agricultural labor. An internal colony was created and maintained (Casey & Watkins, 2014). Most residents in Santa Barbara, Anglo or those of Mexican descent, are unaware of this history and the ways in which it continues to affect those of Mexican descent, both longtime residents and newcomers, and Anglos. In my own efforts at accompaniment of Mexicans without documents, we have reflected together on this history to better understand the ways that power is still unjustly maintained. Through joint educational initiatives, we have tried to bring this history to portions of the Anglo community that might be able to respond in

reparative ways. Throughout the U.S., communities struggle with histories and legacies of racism that need to be known, acknowledged, and metabolized so that they are less likely to haunt the present and hold us back from needed justice in the present. From the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to public conversation about slave reparations, to a wide variety of community dialogues on ongoing racism, many communities are struggling with the effects of historical and ongoing racism in the U.S. (Watkins, 2007).

When the one who accompanies is not from the group being accompanied, he or she often enjoys privileges and freedoms that those accompanied do not have access to. In particular, the one who accompanies who is from elsewhere or from a more privileged group (i.e., in terms of ethnicity, race, or class) usually has the freedom to come and go, and the freedom to choose to share the situation and to what degree. For instance, Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker, chose to live with the poor in New York, foregoing most of her privileged class status, whereas Jane Addams and the other women who founded Hull House in Chicago and welcomed recent immigrants chose to come and go from the settlement house they created, maintaining their own socioeconomic status.

The accompanier may also be a member of the community where the accompaniment occurs. Such an accompanier may share fully in the issues that are being addressed in the accompaniment, and not be divided by class, racial, or ethnic divides. In *A Tradition that Has No Name: Nurturing the Development of People, Families, and Communities* (1997), psychologists Belenky, Bond & Weinstock chronicle the work of African American women in the U.S. Deep South to accompany members of their own communities, creating cultural

centers that promoted intergenerational exchange, supported the fulfilling of community desires, and promoted the arts and leadership traditions of the Africa diaspora to foster wider participation and inclusion. For cultural groups that are not as badly marred by individualism as many white Euro-American groups, practices of accompaniment are often a deep cultural resource that reflect the lived values of interdependence and collective critical awareness.

Due to my own social location as a white American of European ancestry, I did not learn psychosocial accompaniment from my family and community of origin, or from my many years of psychology graduate education, but primarily through my relationships and work with Quakers. Through their tradition of “workcamps” Quakers have partnered with communities to work together in a horizontal manner to help fulfill the needs of the community with an emphasis on justice being necessary for peace. While my earlier practice of psychotherapy certainly contained elements of accompaniment, the paradigm of individualism that undergirded it limited both the degree of psychosocial insight I successfully employed and the boldness of my moving beyond the therapeutic container to the societal roots of the psychological distress I witnessed. When I did succeed in doing the latter, I found myself more deeply involved in community work and participatory research where I learned to widen the arc of accompaniment that I had learned through the practice of psychotherapy. This work has involved more sustained attention to the social roots of suffering, and to those desiring accompaniment who find themselves outside of groups who more routinely find support and witness.

In social science research, researchers have primarily “studied down,” economically speaking, rather than “sidewise,” or “up” to the materially

privileged. Many communities suffering from various forms of oppression and scarcity of resources have protested that to the extent that their difficulties stem from those groups who are relatively advantaged, they would appreciate research and work with those whose lifestyles and choices are creating suffering for others. While liberation theology and psychology speak of a preferential option for the poor, learning from communities about the sources of their suffering can well return a scholar-activist companion back to his or her own community for work that needs to be accomplished.

This was underscored for me in 2003 while I was on a human rights delegation to Zapatista communities in Chiapas, Mexico, members of the *Oficina de Buen Gobierno*, a representative council that governs a region through shared governance, told U.S. visitors not to stay there “to help,” but to return to the United States to affect the policies creating suffering in the region: NAFTA, CAFTA, the war on drugs, the exporting of guns to Mexico, the support of corrupt factions in the Mexican government that have treated the autonomous communities in violent and destructive ways (Watkins, 2012).

In Latin America the practice of accompaniment by mental health professionals has a rich history (Hollander, 1997): during the Dirty War some Argentinian psychoanalysts emerged from their analytic offices to accompany *Las Madres de los Desaparecidos*, the Mothers of the Disappeared, to bring awareness to the abduction and often killing of daughters and sons by the state; Viennese psychoanalyst Marie Langer (1991) went to Nicaragua (via Argentina and Mexico) to work with others to establish a community mental health system during the revolution; Spanish social psychologist and Jesuit Ignacio Martín-Baró^{vi} (1994) accompanied Salvadorans by listening to and then documenting the

human rights abuses and state sponsored violence aimed brutally against them; Lykes (2001) through PhotoVoice and other work in Guatemala accompanied Mayan women as they suffered the effects of genocide and worked to make the genocide known in the wider world.^{vii} In Colombia psychologists accompany families forcibly displaced by paramilitaries from the countryside to Bogotá, families who have often lost family members (Sacipa-Rodríguez, Tovar-Guerra, Galindo-Villareal & Vidales-Bohórquez, p. 222), while others accompany those villagers who have declared their villages zones of peace in the ongoing violence (Fellowship for Reconciliation, N.D.).

In the United States there is also a history of psychosocial accompaniment, but it has rarely been named as such. When it has occurred, often it has been seen as outside the appropriate role for a clinician or a researcher. Indeed, at times, psychologists have been censored for their accompaniment, and risked being seen as having fallen outside the proscribed practices for the profession. Accompaniment is more common in community psychology, but even there it is rarely thematized as such. Its effects on the accompanier are barely mentioned, as an examination of the subjectivity of the psychologist is often lacking.

While the term “accompaniment” is rare in the U.S., the activity is not unknown within psychology and psychiatry in the U.S. For instance, Harry Stack Sullivan, founder of interpersonal psychiatry, turned his attention to those suffering civil rights violations due to racism in the American South (Cushman, 1995). Psychiatrist Robert Coles (2003) accompanied African American families and children who were integrating schools in New Orleans during the Civil Rights Movement, psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton (2005) accompanied Vietnam veterans in rap groups when they returned home from war. Archetypal

psychologist Michael Perlman (1994) accompanied communities experiencing pervasive destruction of trees in the wake of hurricanes and in the face of widespread ecological destruction. Fran Peavey accompanied the Ganges River through forming Friends of the Ganges and collaborating with Indians to form the Sankat Mochan Foundation in Varanasi, whose goal is to clean the Ganges. Joanna Macy and those involved in the Nuclear Guardianship Project have provided earth accompaniment as they have witnessed the storage of radioactive waste, and advocated for ongoing monitoring of these sites.

Those who provide psychosocial accompaniment not only offer a space where a person can share troubling symptoms and seek relief through various therapeutic methodologies, but also offer co-engagement in participatory action research strategies. The accompanier opens himself to hold the often tragic events that gave rise to the symptoms, and to the context that breeds these events. He struggles to help those accompanied have their stories known more widely, if they so desire, and to make sure that these narratives affect public policy and public memory. It is not a practice that is universalizable in a single format, but rather demands to be ethically and empathically crafted and situated in specific places according to the needs and desires of particular others.

Freire (2000) was careful to identify culturally invasive approaches from culturally synthetic ones. Those involved in psychosocial accompaniment are mindful of the power of each individual to construct meanings and to transform the world. Interventions are not to be proposed “from the outside,” but determined with participants, alongside, through dialogue and critical reflection. The accompanier needs to be a reliable presence, making consistent and respectful visits, or living alongside. Through their openness to dialogue the

needs of the individuals and of the community emerge and can be engaged together in a respectful and thoughtful manner. The resilience of those accompanied and their own cultural resources for understanding and healing need to be cherished and supported, not usurped.

A Phenomenology of Accompaniment

Since accompaniment often occurs in situations of difficulty and even danger--where most of those who can disappear do, those who are accompanied feel less abandoned and forgotten, and less likely to be attacked and abused than those left to fend for themselves. They fear less that injustices that are meted out will go unrecorded, unacknowledged, and unpunished. Due to the presence of those who accompany them, there is a bridge to a larger world, even if they are unable to cross it in the present. In the press of daily struggles they feel as though someone has taken the time to listen to their stories, to share the pain and grief they may be feeling, and to lift off their shoulders some of the burdens of the situation. The solidarity of the accompanier with those accompanied helps to build hope that the adverse situation is capable of change in time. This fledgling hope may contribute to helping people gather to strategize about how to transform the situation under consideration. Being accompanied underlines the dignity of those accompanied. I have heard U.S. prisoners speak about what it means to them that volunteers enter the prison to be with them. In the context of an Alternatives to Violence workshop, one said, "At first, I could not believe that the facilitators took the effort to come to this hell hole, to spend time with me. I thought, if they believed in me enough to do this, it was time I began to believe in myself and start planning for the life I want to live upon release."

For the accompanier, accompaniment steers us toward a different kind of being-present from many therapeutic and research strategies. It moves away from forms of egoic rationality that support control, management, “fixing,” and “intervening.” To accompany requires a fundamental re-orientation of psychologists’ professional subjectivity such that we dis-identify with the vertical hierarchy of expertism that has been endemic to our education for professionalization, and instead practice horizontality, moving alongside of others. It entails engaging a process of psychic decolonization that enables us to step aside from modes of relationship that reinscribe colonial hierarchies of power and value. Edge, Kagan & Stewart (2003) describe accompaniment as requiring “time, commitment, and openness and willingness to learn, negotiation of and reflection on relationships as they change, independence from agency allegiances and responsibilities, patience, sense of humour, the ability to listen and hear in non-judgmental ways, a flexible approach to and understanding of more familiar interpersonal boundaries, including, amongst others, those of ‘friend’, ‘helper’, ‘client’, ‘expert’, ‘facilitator’, a continual reconsideration of ethical judgments.”

Too often when individuals and communities experience extremely difficult situations, others turn away with a blind eye. The initial insult is redoubled by others’ absence, by their failures of acknowledgment, empathy, and compassion. Accompaniment can be a needed antidote to the injuries caused by others’ passive bystanding or active denial of the human suffering in their midst (Watkins & Shulman, 2008). While accompaniment cannot wipe away the pain born of traumatic injuries—individual or collective—it can begin to set into motion needed processes of psychic and social restoration. The one who

accompanier turns toward rather than away from those suffering. The accompanier sees and acknowledges seeing what others turn away from. The accompanier brings his presence to what is difficult, allowing it to affect him, to matter to him, to alter his course.

Who is this one who accompanies? She understands that the violence—both direct and structural-- and oppression that people are subjected to has torn the connective tissues that binds humans together. If she can only offer one thing, it is to treat each one with respect, reflecting back the preciousness and dignity of his or her life. At times, the accompanier is an intimate part of the community and its members who are accompanied. She turns her attention to the well-being of the members and the group. At other times, she is one who has left the place where she feels most comfortable, and has chosen to make herself vulnerable. She may be returning to a place she originally came from or is crossing over into a place she has never been before. Either way, this takes effort and intention. She is one who has shown up where others often fail to come, at times when showing up conveys support and solidarity. She does not disappear when staying is inconvenient and even dangerous. She is one who, once known, is invited in. She is trustworthy and reliable.

We can learn from the extensive experience of musicians who accompany singers, dancers, and other musicians. The musical accompanist must listen acutely to the unfolding song or melody or carefully watch the movements of the dancers. Usually the accompanist recedes from the limelight, taking a supportive role. He often plays in a lower pitch, and sometimes does not play in the final performance. He provides the background for more important parts, supplying harmony and rhythm to the melody. He is successful to the degree that he is in

alignment with the unfolding music. One exception to this necessary subordination occurs in what is called dialogue accompaniment, where the accompanier engages in a call and response to the “lead,” being silent or providing rhythm as the lead plays, and playing himself when the lead rests, but always playing in relationship to what has come before—not breaking free of the whole unfolding composition but working in concert with the featured musicians to articulate the evolving music.

The accompanier of others patiently awaits a clear invitation to be present, and removes himself if this is not forthcoming. This is non-negotiable. The “accompanier” must be transparent and honest as to the uses of her involvement, as to who it will profit and how. Those extending an invitation should be able to do so in the fullest knowledge possible of who it is who wants to come and what their motives are. The members of the community must be free to participate with the newcomer or not, and free to ask her to leave. When there is a conflict between the accomplishment of research goals and the well-being of the participants and the community, the latter must be unequivocally chosen. For the accompanier the accumulation of knowledge is not an end in itself. S/he is aware that knowledge is to be used and s/he must strive to be conscious about the uses to which it will be put.

For instance, facilitators of Alternatives to Violence Project workshops in prisons and communities require that participants freely chose to participate or not, and that they are not required by any governing body to attend. Accompaniment programs established to companion immigrants without documents in the U.S. similarly make their presence known to community members, offering their services, but awaiting an invitation to accompany any

particular person to his or her court proceedings regarding detention and deportation.

The one who accompanies knows how to resist leading when it is important that others do so. She values being alongside of others, working together with them, enjoying the mutual empowerment and greater understanding that arises when all partners are involved in knowledge-making. She has practiced holding her plans and interpretations lightly, choosing instead to hear the desires and meanings of others.

While she offers her support, she is ready to find that *she* is the one who will feel gratitude. Often the one who accompanies finally joins into the situations she has been separated from by virtue of her own social location. In doing so, her own dissociation begins to heal—her dissociation from the wider community, from the implications of histories of oppression and violence, from her own psychic numbing against the feelings she carries in response to the knowings she silences. She is able to emerge from the dissociation of bystanding violence—direct and indirect-- to being an engaged witness who participates with others to create conditions for peace built on justice. In doing so, feelings of alienation and loneliness, born of individualistic modes of thinking and relating, begin to lose their grip.

The accompanier realizes that she is not the only one doing the looking, the observing. She wonders how she is seen, and is willing to discover things about herself she never imagined, or only feared. What privilege she enjoys is not invisible, far from it. By leaving her comfort zone, she may find that what she has taken for granted about herself and her life are thrown into question. She may feel shame, guilt, and embarrassment. She risks a rupture of her own certainties.

When we accompany someone who is not from our own community we are not on our own ground. We join them on theirs—even if this is a temporary place such as a refugee camp. The command we wordlessly exercise in our own offices, labs, and classrooms evaporates. Any plan we hold-- however gingerly-- is subject to the critique of many voices, and displacement by other strategies conceived together or conceived by community members without us. The accompanier requires not only an invitation, but a practiced and certain humility.

The accompanier has questions, but he wonders what questions compel others' interest. He can write, and perhaps he can produce videos, but he wonders how others desire to make their experiences known, if indeed they do. He listens for the images and the storylines that reach through and beyond words. He searches for the roots of feelings and symptoms, desiring a more complete understanding of the causes of suffering. He makes a point not only to hear into the suffering being experienced, but to witness strengths, beauty, and buoyancy, and takes part in activities that feed the spirit. He notes the assets, resilience, and creativity of others, as subtly as he senses their vulnerabilities, uncertainties, and needs. He is humble because much is unknown, but he is bold for the same reason, wanting to better understand and to act with others as needed.

If he has the freedom to come and go, he may be helpful in creating alliances, to bring the public spotlight to what has been pushed aside and hidden and needs to be illumined. He works across similar situations, building alliances so that those denied forms of dominant power, can find solidarity and support in their shared experiences and through their intensified interconnections. His witness calls forth his advocacy, and whether or not he is schooled in lobbying

and policy transformation, he may--with others—need to find his way in and through these worlds to honor what he has borne witness to.

He is one who bears the tales of others, and turns to meet his own. He works at being a witness for what many would turn away from. He has found the spot where the difficulty of what is heard becomes bearable thanks to the intimacy bred from sharing it, a fortunate alchemy in a sad world. He has left the familiar to be of some help, and finds that he has not only come to know others, but to come upon himself. Some of his hidden wounds are no longer obscured from himself. His own complicity with the status quo that harms others may be revealed, and when he acts to remediate this failure, his values are sharpened and his integrity deepened.

Mark Potter (2011) in “Solidarity as Spiritual Exercise: Accompanying Migrants at the US/Mexico Border” presents a “spiritual phenomenology” of solidarity that is particularly relevant to companions who enjoy wider societal privileges than those they accompany. He draws on the work of Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino. From his reading of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, Sobrino believes that a potential of solidarity is for it to be a spiritual practice that can engender mutual transformation. Honoring and living into liberation theology’s preferential option for the poor, the practice of solidarity is not a selfless act for others characterized as poor. Rather, the spiritual poverty and indifferent remove of those who live on islands of affluence is challenged, leading to a potential for self-transformation from an isolated “I” to a self-in-relation-with-others.

Gustavo Gutiérrez (in Griffin & Block, 2013) clarifies that the preferential option for the poor is not to exclude the non-poor but to work toward a

universality of love, reversing the usual starting point among the privileged that too often ends up excluding the least powerful. Potter (2011) outlines “five movements of the spiritual exercise of solidarity” that help to cultivate the humility and courage required for accompaniment (p. 835). “The first movement of solidarity as a spiritual exercise is for the non-poor to physically enter into a broken reality—the reality of suffering, the violence of poverty, the social context that is normative for the vast majority of people in our world” (p. 835). He quotes a Brazilian proverb, “the head thinks from where the feet are planted.” Potter stresses the importance of moving one’s bodily presence so that one can come into contact with those who suffer in the very place they are living their lives. They are not asked to come to the psychologist’s office or lab; the psychologist goes to them.

The second movement is to respond to those who suffer with compassion and mercy. While the first two movements are outward, the 3rd is inward. Potter, building on Jon Sobrino’s thought, stresses that through inward attention, the non-poor may experience a double humility that quickens appropriate feelings of shame. The first humility, Potter says, is one of association, where one’s proximity to people who live closer to death, places one into more intimate relationship with one’s own vulnerability and insecurity. The “second humility,” he says, “is the realization that one has somehow been responsible for causing or exacerbating the suffering of others,” through action or inaction and inattentiveness. “In this sense, the scandal of the poverty and suffering of another—that which threatens their dignity and humanity—indicates a grave deficiency in my own human dignity that I have been complicit in the dehumanization of others. In other words, my encounter with the

consequences of sin experienced by others makes me much more aware of my own sin" (p. 836). In the formation of relationships across the border between poor and non-poor, both parties confront the way in which oppression and domination cut across their experiences. "[T]he sin of one's suffering is directly related to the sin of another's active complicity or indifference. Potter describes how this can be a period of profound desolation for the non-poor, and they can be fearful of the wrath of the poor. Indeed, the poor may be angry and resentful regarding the condescension of the non-poor.

Potter argues that through a combination of the non-poor's willingness to help shoulder the burdens of the poor, the poor's generosity, and by means of grace, that a relationship can be born that bears forgiveness and acceptance. "The non-poor receive from the poor a new horizon in which to understand their responsibilities to participate in the transformation of the social reality that separates them, and a consciousness of why they so desperately need the humanizing influence of the poor to overcome their own sins. In short, they experience and learn the truth of the phrase, "We need each other," and experience without fear or misunderstanding the truth of the claim that 'apart from the poor there is no salvation'" (p. 836). Potter describes the fifth movement as one where the poor and the non-poor live in the knowledge that their "salvation depends upon one another, and their transformation through relationship with one another."

Philosopher, theologian, and priest Ignacio Ellacuría, a Jesuit murdered alongside Ignacio Martín-Baró in El Salvador in 1989, rejected embracing "the accumulation of capital as the engine of history, and the possession-enjoyment of wealth as the principle of humanization" (Potter, 2011). He opposed a

competitive and individualistic culture that has as its aim accumulation of capital--a culture marred by arrogance, greed, and a propensity to use violence to achieve and retain power-- with cultures of solidarity where the meeting of everyone's basic needs is a primary and foundational goal.

The relationships developed between the non-poor and the poor in a time of dizzying income divides are living protest to the centrifugal processes set into motion by transnational corporate globalization. To place oneself in proximity, alongside, those abandoned in what Chris Hedges (hedges & Sacco, 2012) calls "zones of sacrifice" is to enter into conversation that rejects a vertical ordering of relationship, that seeks to metabolize the feelings of shame^{viii} that arise through restorative action, and to re-orient one's life to honor what one has come to understand. Such a model exposes how accompaniment serves the one who set out to accompany, and by virtue of their encounters with others becomes clearer about how to seek greater integrity in their lives, so that the work they do and the manner in which they pursue it are more consonant with their deeper understandings of what is needed and important in the world that we share.

"Model, Schemas, Examples"

Fanon (2005) called for examples that would quicken our imagination of how we might join in "projects and collaboration with others on tasks that strengthen man's totality" (p.236). With this goal in mind, I want to share some examples of psychosocial accompaniment.

Psychosocial research can provide significant and needed accompaniment in the face of traumas inflicted on individuals and communities. (Sacipa-Rodríguez, Tovar-Guerra, Galindo-Villareal & Vidales-Bohórquez (2009) discuss

“psychosocial accompaniment” in the context of working with Colombian families forcibly displaced from the countryside by violence. Their goals were “to make a concerted effort to understand and serve the people in Bogotá who suffer from displacement; thus assuming the position of standing up for life, defending human dignity, and building peace and justice; as well as understanding the Colombian armed conflict in its ethic[al] and political character” (p. 221).

[It is] a process offering the displaced person a space to recognize their emotional experience along with the possibility to express their feelings afterward, reflecting on the facts implied by violent acts. We speak of psychosocial process that facilitates recuperation and repair of social and cultural damage. We believe that accompaniment should be directed toward the affirmation of displaced persons as subjects in their own stories and the reconstruction of the social fabric of the community. (p. 222).

They stress the importance of the principles of tolerance, mutual respect, and solidarity for building peace, and embrace UNESCO’s call for cultures of peace founded on “solidarity, active nonviolence, pluralism, and an active posture against exclusion and structural violence” (p. 224). They are inspired by the work of Zabala, Freire, Fals Borda, and Martín-Baró, particularly their commitment to the oppressed and to “engagement with social and critical emancipation from dominant structures” (p. 222). Following Martín-Baró, they see political violence as rupturing social relationships, and the healing of post-conflict situations as necessarily linked to the restoration of trust and relationship.

Their goal as social psychologists, they said, “was to connect not only with

the displaced person's logical mind, but also with their affection and spirituality. Informal everyday chats, actively listening, working and teaching were the vehicles allowing us to develop open relationships" (Sacipa-Rodríguez, Tovar-Guerra, Galindo-Villareal & Vidales-Bohórquez, 2009, p. 224). Through the collection of oral histories, the co-creation of support groups, the recognition and valuing of community resources that contribute to empowerment and resilience, the participants were able to create a community that gradually provided ties of trust. The authors emphasize, however, that a fuller recovery from suffering requires "peace and a dignified life," the latter supported by meaningful work (p. 233). For the psychosocial reconstruction of a community to be ultimately effective, it must be part of a total approach that includes changes in the social, economic, and political life of the country. The families wanted it to be clear in public records and memory that their loved ones were falsely assumed to be guerillas. They also wanted to know where their loved ones' remains are so that proper burials could be conducted. Honoring these deep desires, psychologists needed to become knowledgeable about and effective in interfacing with relevant judicial and public authorities and processes.

In the face of violent repression of people and information in El Salvador in the 1980's, Martín-Baró (1994) created a public opinion institute at his university. Through the analysis of anonymous surveys he was able to disseminate information about the political abuses and daily horror which citizens were experiencing and which it would have been too dangerous for each individual to speak openly about. Strategically deployed research can help to document the situations people are struggling with, so that civil society can be better mobilized to intervene in the ongoing injustices and violence to bring them

to an end. Here the intimate listening of accompaniment is amplified through research and dissemination strategies.

For instance, several U.S. psychologists involved in the treatment of refugees who had experienced torture in their countries of origin were alarmed when the existence and extent of torture at Abu' Ghraib prison in Iraq, in the black box detention centers set up in undisclosed locations for terrorism suspects, and at Guantanamo Bay became partially known. They gathered with other psychologists to form the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology, dedicated to removing psychologists from torture and abusive interrogation, and to instead employ psychologists in the promotion of social justice and human rights. They documented not only the changes in codes for prisoner treatment that formally permitted forms of treatment that were formerly deemed torture (and still are in most of the rest of the international community), but also changes that were created in the American Psychological Associations' ethics code to allow psychologists to be involved in the deployment of torture without losing their license to practice psychology, a clear abrogation of earlier ethics standards. To date, not a single psychologist who has been involved in torture has lost their license to practice psychology. The psychologists exposing these abuses-- including Coalition spokespeople Stephen Soldz, Steve Reisner, Jean Marie Arrigo, Brad Olson, Roy Eidelson, Trudy Bond, and Bryant Welch-- left their usual professional roles as psychotherapists to enter into years of research, education of civil society and members of their own professional societies, at personal risk and sacrifice. One, Steve Reisner, twice allowed others to nominate him for the presidency of APA with the aim of more directly grappling with the forces that allowed such a serious collusion between the military and

psychologists, not for healing but for torture.

Of all the forms of psychological research, participatory action research (PAR) is most resonant with the idea of accompaniment. In PAR the psychologically trained researcher partners with a group or community to offer research support for the questions they are seeking answers to. Instead of participants serving the research agenda of the psychologist, the psychologist serves the research needs of the community. The research is undertaken together to assist in the achieving of mutual goals. Community members gain the skills of formulating research questions, conducting interviews, analyzing data, and discerning effective ways of disseminating findings that assist in the achievement of shared goals.

In my estimation, no one exemplifies participatory action research as accompaniment more than M. Brinton Lykes. Over an eight-year process, Lykes collaborated with Ixil and Quiché Maya women to develop economic development projects, a bilingual educational program for children, and psychosocial creative workshops for women. Women with differing religious and political affiliations, widows of soldiers and guerrillas, as well as internationalists, joined together through a participatory action research process “to create a photoessay that recounts the community’s story of war and survival as well as current efforts to rethread social relations and rebuild institutions” (Lykes & Mersky, 2006).

More recently through the Post-Deportation Human Rights Project Lykes has been collaborating with human rights lawyers, immigrant community groups, deportees, and undocumented families to explore the effects of current U.S. detention and deportation policies on Salvadoran and Guatemalan families

residing in the Northeast U.S. “A major goal of the PDHRP is to reintroduce legal predictability, proportionality, compassion, and respect for family unity into the deportation laws in the U.S. through successfully defending individual deportees, thereby setting new precedents and creating a new area of legal representation.” Through her long-standing accompaniment of Guatemalans who suffered the genocide, she was able to bring a team of graduate students and social scientists to interview returning deportees as well as families who were separated from family members due to forced migration in Guatemala. She describes the overall project:

The current interdisciplinary and participatory action research (PAR) project was designed to create collaborative spaces for bridging the growing chasms between citizens and non-citizens and for deepening a shared understanding of and response to injustices that immigrant families (many of which include U.S.-born citizen children) face. PAR is one of several critical approaches to research and seeks to develop collaborative processes that prioritize the voices and actions of those marginalized from power and resources in educational, advocacy, and organizing activities that contribute to knowledge construction and material social change and/or transformation. Through iterative processes, co-researchers, including local community members, members of activist groups, and students and professors from universities or other institutions identify a problem focus, gather information, critically analyze root causes, and press towards redressing the injustice (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). To realize these aspirations, Fals Borda (2000) calls for the activist researcher to assume a moral and humanistic orientation that

includes altruism and solidarity. Thus, he describes PAR as a “life project” (Fals Borda, 1985, 1998) which includes research and actions. (Lykes, Hershberg & Brabeck, 2011)

The interdisciplinary team seeks “to contextualize current risks to families within a socio-historical, sociopolitical and transnational framework” and “to collaboratively respond to current realities through community-based actions, policy development, advocacy and organizing” (Lykes, Hershberg & Brabeck, 2011). Many families felt that their initial experience of being under siege in Guatemala during the war was reinscribed in the U.S. in situations where their families felt under attack by workplace and home raids, the constant threat of detention and deportation, and the steady assault of racism. The activities of this ongoing research program are multiple: bimonthly support groups, leadership development workshops, periodic meetings to discuss objectives and the research process, community feedback and planning meetings, a series of inter-organizational, community-led Know Your Rights (KYR) workshops which utilized drama and small group discussion. In community feedback sessions “community members discuss preliminary findings from data analyses, offer alternative interpretations, and engage in debate about, for example, traditional and more contemporary family patterns that constrain or facilitate how undocumented parents face threats posed to their families.”

Lykes, Hershberg & Brabeck (2011) describe how they learned from the experiential knowledge of community members, enabling them to discuss the relevant issues with fellow citizens. This has also been my own experience in being part of a participatory oral history project in Santa Barbara conducted by the immigrant rights group, PUEBLO. Aware of the need to build bridges

between the Latino immigrant and Anglo communities, I began to regularly attend the meetings, offering my help as requests arose. After more than a year, one of the members, Aidín Castillo, proposed an oral history project that would collect the *testimonios* of undocumented immigrants in Santa Barbara, and then organize them into a book that could be used with various community and faith groups, and as part of school curriculum (Immigration Rights Committee, PUEBLO, 2008). The goal was to help the wider community understand the experiences and challenges of neighbors in Santa Barbara without documents, particularly those from Mexico, our town's largest immigrant source. Trained in participatory research and oral history methodologies, I offered to assist. My offer was accepted, and I was asked to help in various ways throughout the two year project: contributing to the education of the research volunteers, helping to host sessions that planned the project and crafted the interview questions, assisted in creating a strategy to analyze the interviews with regard to the key themes the group felt would be illuminating for readers, and contributed to efforts to disseminate the findings in a way that could stimulate community conversations, particularly between immigrants and citizens. At many points in such a process the psychologist must make sure that she is not usurping others' roles in the research process so that it can be a mutually empowering experience, where the knowledge and gifts of each team member can contribute to a successful project. Lykes and Moane (2009) describe that such projects require "critical reflexivity and 'just enough trust' to facilitate engagement across differences, in 'spaces' of *choque*, dialogue and appreciation, wherein we craft solidarity, 'lateral assists' among *nos-otras*, and alliances for a renewed and transformed praxis" (p. 293).

The researcher living out a commitment to accompaniment now understands that his skills for inquiry can be shared with others so that they can inquire on their own behalf. He no longer conceives of his projects and questions by himself. He no longer takes his interviews back into his office, offering interpretations that go without others' interpretations, insight, and critique. He understands the wisdom of participatory action research, and embraces a process of co-collaboration.

Psychosocial-Environmental Accompaniment

The burdens of environmental degradation are not suffered equally. Many marginalized communities and regions disproportionately suffer what Rob Nixon (2011) calls "slow violence," "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space....a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales" (p.2). It is this "slow violence" that has led to the "environmentalism of the poor." Many insults to the environment—i.e., toxic spills, poisoning in war as in Agent Orange and radiation—play themselves out, says Nixon (2011), in the "cellular drama of mutations...particularly in the bodies of the poor," where they "remain largely unobserved, undiagnosed, and untreated" (p. 6). In psychologists' attention to the effects of violence on individuals and communities, accompaniment in the face of this slow and ongoing environmental violence is needed. This work is also "psychosocial" not only because of the psychological and social damage that is suffered, but because

often environmental assaults are caused or exacerbated by racial, ethnic, and class inequities.

Sociologist Kai Erikson (1994) has been invited to accompany communities in the wake of environmental assault for over three decades. Through interviewing those who are suffering the effects of a catastrophe, what he calls a “new species of trouble,” Erikson is able to write a revealing research report on the psychological and community repercussions of this “new species of trouble,” and to appear on their behalf in court to help argue for deserved damages. Environmental disasters caused by fellow humans, he says, are “one of the social and psychological signatures of our time” (p. 240). They carry with them distinctive assaults on individual and community trust, tearing apart a sense that one can rely on fellow humans.

Human beings are surrounded by layers of trust, radiating out in concentric circles like ripples in a pond. The experience of trauma at its worst, can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self but a loss of confidence in the scaffolding of family and community, in the structures of human government, in the larger logics by which humankind lives, and in the ways of nature itself. (p. 242)

Accompaniment is an antidote to tears in the delicate tissues of trust. It will in most instances prove insufficient to restore full confidence, but without it such assaults fail to be metabolized so that life can continue in any way that resembles the time before the assault. Such accompaniment may, of course, come from many corners--family members, neighbors, health care providers, legal aids, emergency workers—but, to this list, we need to include ourselves as psychologists.

Psychiatrist Matthew Dumont (1994) directed the community mental health center in Chelsea when it was a white working class and poor community attached to Boston by the longest bridge in New England, the Mystic-Tobin Bridge. Over a period of years he and his staff noticed a soaring in the number of families seeking treatment for their children with attention and learning difficulties. Blood testing revealed epidemic lead poisoning. Lead is a neurotoxin that causes cognitive difficulties in the domains of attention, executive function, visuospatial/visual motor functioning, auditory processing, perceptual integration, and short-term memory. Dumont came to realize that as the government sanded the Mystic-Tobin Bridge, lead paint filings were falling on schools and playgrounds, vegetable gardens, and hundreds of back porches, poisoning children and adults. While one could refer children for lead testing, treat them for lead poisoning, and work with parents and teachers on how to parent and educate children whose cognitive processes have been so catastrophically affected, the problem remained that they kept blasting lead paint off the Tobin Bridge, adding more and more children to the rosters for treatment. Following the children's symptoms to their root cause led Dumont out of the consulting room, through the clinic doors, to meetings with community members, public meetings with Massport (the agency in charge of the bridge repair), and continued advocacy for responsible environmental stewardship. He had followed the symptoms, in this case hyperactivity and poor learning of the children. This following, slowly but surely, placed him and others into political protest on the Tobin Bridge, which eventually stopped the sandblasting.

More recently, psychiatrist Mindy Fullilove (2005) also followed symptoms out the door of her clinic into research conversations and archives

across America that helped her understand the vast destruction of African-American neighborhoods during the period of “urban renewal” in American cities, 1949-1973. Fullilove was attentive to spatial aspects of trauma as she listened to community members struggling with psychological suffering. Apprenticing herself to people like David Jenkins, who spent the first 11 years of his life in the Philadelphia neighborhood of Elmwood, she became aware of how we compensate for life’s difficulties through the web of human and other-than-human relationships that the place of our neighborhood provides.

Vicious scapegoating in his family, and sexual abuse outside the family left David’s sense of intimacy twisted and stunted. By contrast, the unrestrained love within the tight circle of the neighborhood gave him a sense of optimism that has never deserted him. The enormous endowment of love he received from the neighborhood—“everyone tried to give me as much love as they could”—did not undo the curse put on him by his dysfunctional family. But it did create a buffer that prevented the abuse from becoming the entirety of his world. This buffer did give him reason to live while he healed as best he could. (p. 120)

Many years later David Jenkins could still point out on a map of his neighborhood where home cooking was to be found, where the roses grew that he took to his teachers, the nearby marshland where the turtles and other animals he admired lived, and where the particular people were homed who sustained him as he made his daily path. Jenkins’ neighborhood was seized for urban “renewal” and destroyed, causing the destruction of the natural places he visited, dispersing across Philadelphia those who had loved him, and utterly

disrupting the nodes of gathering so important to cultural preservation, particularly of a people once enslaved, and multiply dis-placed.

Fullilove walked the area with Jenkins to gather into her awareness the magnitude and multitude of his losses, as well as that of many others across the United States in similar situations of displacement. She pieced together the systematic destruction of 2500 neighborhoods in 993 American cities during the period of urban renewal, 80% of them neighborhoods of color. Her work, *Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America, and What We Can Do About It*, is a testament to all that is lost when people are required to disperse from the places that hold them:

Root shock, at the level of the individual is a profound emotional upheaval that destroys the working model of the world that had existed in the individual's head. Root shock undermines trust, increases anxiety about letting loved ones out of one's sight, destabilizes relationships, destroys social, emotional, and financial resources, and increases the risk for every kind of stress-related disease, from depression to heart attack....

Root shock, at the level of the local community, be it neighborhood or something else, ruptures bonds, dispersing people to all the directions of the compass. Even if they manage to regroup, they are not sure what to do with one other. People who were near are too far, and people who were far are too near. (p. 14)

Fullilove accompanied David to the site of his childhood neighborhood, and witnessed firsthand its demise and the affects of this on David. To understand what she was seeing, however, required many additional steps that slowly revealed the systematic dismembering of communities of color and the

devastating individual and collective trauma that has resulted. Her more recent work, *Urban Alchemy: Restoring Joy in America's Sorted-Out Cities* chronicles her accompaniment of a number of cities and communities as they study the interfaces between the environment, community relations, and individual psychology. To prepare for such accompaniment she apprenticed herself to French urbanist Michel Cantal-Dupart and others who learned to read the ways in which an environment encourages or discourages contact between people and groups, between people and the history of the place they call home, and between people and the non-human aspects of their environment including buildings, water, trees, and gardens.

Trans-Species and Earth Accompaniment

North Americans of European descent have been slow to understand that humans are not the only ones who call for accompaniment in the face of domination and violence. Animal communities, rivers, mountains, soil, vegetation, atmosphere, neighborhoods, cities, and towns are also affected by overconsumption and greed that seek excess comfort and aggrandizement of capital at the expense of others—human and other-than-human. Many land-based indigenous cultures around the globe have intricate and ethical epistemologies that recognize the sacred aspects of all beings and earth forms. Their attention to relationship has not been restricted to humans, but extend to animals, rivers, and mountains, and to the effects of their actions on future generations. Paradigms of interdependency are sorely needed as we face up to the challenges of avoiding ever more massive ecocide, and seek to establish ways of living in concert with other-than-human nature. Across the globe indigenous

groups are leading the struggle for governments to include the well-being of nature among their central priorities and responsibilities, and to resist neoliberal globalization's injurious incursions that sicken, denude and destroy nature. The inclusion of the rights of nature in the Ecuadorean Constitution in 2008 is a stunning example of this respect of and care for the other-than-human-nature. The Inuits' Petition to the Inter American Commission on Human Rights Seeking Relief from Violations Resulting from Global Warming Caused by Acts and Omissions of the United States is an exemplary effort that links the well-being of human communities with the well-being of the atmosphere and other-than-human-animal communities.

People of European descent, severed from their own indigenous connections with nature, have much to learn from societies who have always believed in the rights of nature and ecosystems to exist free of destructive and exploitative human behavior. Throughout the world, indigenous environmental movements are linking with civil society to network and form transnational alliances to pursue legal pathways to safeguard nature, and to gain restitution for extensive harms suffered. For instance, Vandana Shiva (1999) accompanies indigenous communities in India in their fight against genetic manipulation of seeds, and champions with them "seed freedom," arguing that seeds have a right to evolve through their own processes of self-organization. Gay Bradshaw (2010; Bradshaw & Watkins, 2006) has extended the concept of collective trauma to animal communities experiencing the deleterious effects of human behavior and choices that result in shrinking habitat, displacement, separation of animal families, and violence against members of the animal community. Her organization, *Kerulos Center*, works with indigenous groups to create wildlife

monuments, to memorialize the tragic loss of species.

Communities working on the Earth Charter and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Mother Earth are currently generating multiple ideas for how we can accompany animal communities, bioregions, and particular regions where degraded water, earth, and air exist due to human pollution. One idea is to assign ombudspeople to advocate for the rights of nature and for the rights of future generations to the unpolluted necessities for human and other-than-human life. The possibility of an international criminal court for environmental crimes is also being pursued through a variety of means.

Meanwhile visionary people around the globe are standing alongside animal communities displaced from their habitat and violently assaulted for profit (Bradshaw, 2010). While some are dedicating their lives to witnessing the pollution of the earth and waters by radioactive waste, others are attempting to prevent the destruction of mountaintops, and the thoughtless pollution of rivers and streams. Trans-species and earth-based accompaniment are interlinked with human accompaniment, as more people begin to embrace and enhance the interconnection between living systems on earth.

Apprenticeships in Accompaniment

Accompaniment can take place in many spheres of life, and does not necessarily require professionalization. However, to take it seriously within psychology graduate training requires a re-imagining of curriculum and practicums. The spheres in which students are preparing to undertake accompaniment need to directly influence the curricular offerings.

For instance, those seeking to work with communities recovering from

violence will need not only an understanding of individual and collective trauma and varied approaches to individual and community healing. They will need to understand the long history of the conflict in the particular region they are working in and the present psychosocial needs of the community. In their “backpack” or “toolbox” they will want to understand what contributes to cycles of violence, how communities have influenced these factors, and how to build dynamic and sustainable peacebuilding. Students will need to have experiences through community and ecopsychological fieldwork of joining into the work of a community, of learning to deeply listen, to be nimble in being of assistance, often outside of the categories one has imagined for oneself. It will be helpful to understand how to undertake participatory research in case this is needed, and how to evaluate the results of programs that may be instituted in concert with community members to assess their actual effectiveness. A holistic understanding of how to move between interdependent levels of organization (place, individual, family, interpersonal, community, regional, national, global) is necessary to an understanding of psychosocial and ecological accompaniment, as is a knowledgeable openness to addressing policy and legislation that may impact a given situation. In addition, they must undergo a continuing exploration of their own subjectivity for remnants of coloniality, and examine the intersection of their families’ history with historical and ongoing injustice and exploitation. In “Creating and Sharing Critical Community Psychology Curriculum for the 21st Century,” Nuria Ciofalo and I (2011) have addressed these issues from our own experience crafting a masters and doctoral level program in critical community psychology, liberation psychology, and ecopsychology.

Accompaniers as “Negative Workers”

Those who embrace the idea and practice of accompaniment should reflect on whether it places them in a group French sociologist René Lorau (1975) called “negative workers.” Critical anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes, borrowing on the radical Italian psychiatrist Franco Bascaglia, describes “negative workers” as professionals who give their allegiance not to bourgeois institutions but to those who most need and want their help (Scheper-Hughes, 1992). They are

a species of class traitor, usually a ‘technician of practical knowledge’ (doctor, teacher, lawyer, social worker, manager, or supervisor) who colludes with the powerless to identify their needs *against* the interests of the bourgeois institution. (p. 541)

Singer and Baer (1995) describe negative workers as creating “‘openings’” in mainstream institutions that allow for critical” practice (p. 36).

If accompaniment is to be a role with integrity, it must not feed off those who suffer from the collective traumas of our time, but be genuinely committed to changing the conditions that sow the seeds of these difficulties, thus painstakingly undoing the need for their own role. Whatever psychological knowledge is useful should be made available to those who would express a need for it, instead of being hoarded to make one’s expertise more valuable.

It is probably not possible for a Western psychologist such as myself to actively imagine and enact psychological practices that do not carry traces of coloniality. This reality requires accompaniers to engage in and be open to a state of continuing self-critique. Perhaps accompaniment of the less privileged by the

non-poor--while an important step—is a step on a longer path from the kinds of academic professionalization that have been common in Euro-American graduate programs to forms of walking in “the company” of one another, “night and day, for all times” (Fanon, 2004, p. 239). Perhaps it is a necessary step in societies such as the U.S. that are so perniciously divided along class, racial, and ethnic lines. Will we one day be able to undo the professionalization of accompanying one another that professional psychology might entail? One day will the kinds of useful knowledge that psychologists develop be sufficiently democratized so that they are both widely available outside of specialized training and susceptible to cross-cultural analysis and critique? Will the tragic divides of privilege and scarcity be so erased, that we can show up alongside one another less in the form of one person with more privileges accompanying another with fewer, and more as fellow musicians creatively exploring and playing music with one another? For even in a more just world, each of us would continue to be subject to life struggles where being accompanied is welcomed, where the deep hospitality of one to another can help to lift the burdens that weigh down one’s spirit.^{ix}

Sadly, all this seems a long way off. In the meantime, I here propose accompaniment as a humble yet potent antidote to forms of psychological professionalism that misread symptoms of distress (Watkins & Shulman, 2008), that fail to see deeply enough, that insulate against the acute and chronic sufferings around us, and that unwittingly participate in sustaining the disastrous divides from which we suffer.

Accompaniment may be able to grow up within more traditional roles for the psychologically-minded, until it overflows the container of the discipline

itself. There are signs of this happening already. Most of the examples I have given of accompaniment in this essay were not directly funded but engaged in by psychologists who were sustained by their salaries as professors, mental health administrators, clinicians, and researchers. Due to the abnegation of hierarchical professionalism, accompaniment runs against the grain of a psychology regulated by a capitalist market. As those who accompany share their practices, they do, indeed, undermine bourgeois institutions, and embody the kinds of negative work Lorau spoke of. A few examples will illustrate this.

Dennis Rivers, creator of the *The Seven Challenges: A Guide to Cooperative Communication Skills for Success at Home and Work*, intentionally organized and published online all he could learn about developing skills for cooperative communication into a free downloadable and translatable book (<http://newconversations.net/sevenchallenges.pdf>). In the last year alone the site has been visited 128,000 times by people from 100 countries, who have downloaded 21,000 copies. The site has been in existence for 16 years.

Patricia Cane, while engaged in community work in El Salvador, was asked by a group of women to share the Tai Chi and other exercises that they observed her doing outside each morning before setting out to work. They explained that they noticed a health and tranquility arising from the exercises that they needed given the stresses of the ongoing violence around them. Cane responded to their request and came to understand the role of selfcare and “body literacy” in communities that have suffered collective traumas. She worked through many somatic healing practices from a wide variety of cultures and developed an approach to individual and group trauma healing based on somatic practices, *Capacitar*. *Capacitar* practices are now being taught in 35

countries, including the U.S. (<http://www.capacitar.org/>).

Burundian Adrien Niyongaba and U.S. Carolyn Keys understood that the Alternatives to Violence Project developed by prisoners and Quakers in the United States could be adapted for intercommunity post-genocide trauma healing in Burundi and Rwanda. They created *Healing and Re-Building Our Communities*, which facilitates awareness and healing of the psychological and community effects of violence (<http://aglifpt.org/Program/hroc.htm>). Both *Capacitar* and *Healing and Re-Building Our Communities* engage interested participants to be future facilitators, multiplying the availability of free workshops. *Healing and Re-Building Our Communities* is now being used in the U.S., particularly with refugee communities. While such initiatives need to be continually mindful of cultural impositions, the cross-cultural nature of their efforts contributes to mitigating against this.

Conclusion: “Accompanying or Not Accompanying”?

The choice is between accompanying or not accompanying the oppressed majorities.

Martín-Baró, 1996, p. 46

Martín-Baró (1996) concluded his last essay shortly before his assassination in 1989 with a challenge to psychologists to critically confront the social system their work is embedded within: “the most radical choice Central American psychologists face today concerns the disjunction between an accommodation to a social system that has benefitted us personally and a critical confrontation with that system” (p. 46). This observation, we have argued, is also true for U.S. psychologists as they witness the need for psychosocial, ecological,

and environmental accompaniment in many spheres of life. The passage continues,

the choice is between accompanying or not accompanying the oppressed majorities....This is not a question of whether to abandon psychology; it is a question of whether psychological knowledge will be placed in the service of constructing a society where the welfare of the few is not built on the wretchedness of the many, where the fulfillment of some does not require that others be deprived, where the interests of the minority do not demand the dehumanization of all. (p. 46).

If psychology is to emerge from its role in support of colonial discourses and practices, if it is to reject the pernicious aspects of neoliberal globalization so many and so much suffer from, then we must be honest about the genesis of the symptoms we are seeing. We must tolerate the enormity of the challenges to human, community, animal and earth well-being. If we are to honor what we come to understand by listening closely to other human beings and the places they inhabit, then our professional practices must come to include accompaniment, and the advocacy, witness, solidarity, and critical understanding and action that flow from it. This is not a psychology that founds itself first on the positivistic and objectivistic pursuit of knowledge, but a psychology that bears and responds to the broken heart of our current world.

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ⁱ An earlier version of these remarks were offered at a plenary panel at the 30th Anniversary Conference of Psychologists for Social Responsibility in Washington, D.C., July 13, 2012 in response to a portion of the conference call to address how we should broaden psychology toward social justice and inclusion.

ⁱⁱ Research by Dixon, Durrheim, Kerr, and Thomae (2013) found that encouraging prejudice reduction where oppression and injustice is ongoing can de-energize resistance and protest by diminishing “the extent to which social injustice is acknowledged, rejected, and challenged” (p. 1) by those effected by it. They warn against the possible deleterious effects of pursuing elements of reconciliation such as prejudice reduction without prior or at least parallel success at achieving increased justice in areas such as racism, classism, and sexism. Often the word “reconciliation” is a misnomer, because there has not been an established relationship that can be restored. One is building relationships for the first time. When efforts of building relationships between members of an oppressor group and members of an oppressed group occur, the caveat of their potential effect on resistance should be openly discussed and efforts taken to mitigate against this potential downside.

ⁱⁱⁱ Local efforts of ecological sustainability must develop linkage with efforts elsewhere to insure that practices that clean up and work to sustain one ecological region do not deleteriously effect others, as in transporting toxic waste

from one place to another or locating polluting companies in disadvantaged neighborhoods or regions. Without viewing local efforts in the context of other regions and the globe as a whole, the environmentalism of privileged communities too often fails to work effectively with what Rob Nixon (2011) calls “the environmentalism of the poor.”

^{iv} These expressions of accompaniment draw broadly on the idea of accompaniment in Christianity, where it is used to speak of God’s accompaniment of people through Jesus, as well as to describe those who accompanied Jesus to Gethsemane and Calvary. They also borrow directly from liberation theology’s “preferential option for the poor” that calls upon us to accompany, to be alongside, those who are suffering the most from perniciously unjust inequalities. In addition to accompanying the poor, Archbishop Oscar Romero called upon members of the church to accompany those whose faith has called them to engage the political for the sake of the poor. While not drawn himself initially to the political, Romero came to understand that the demands of justice force us to confront the political. Those whose faith have led them to be active politically in repressive and violent contexts, often need accompaniment not only for support but to help safeguard their lives.

^v Block and Griffin (2013) describe four expressions of Gustavo Gutiérrez and Paul Farmer’s moral imagination: “First, a lifelong commitment to accompany the poor in their daily struggles; second, raising a prophetic voice in the public

square—no matter what the cost; third, integrating theory and practice; and, fourth, building up the Kingdom of God in the here and now” (p. 5).

^{vi} Martín-Baró (1994) used the word “accompany” when contrasting the mission of the church for charismatic renewal Catholics and those of Christian base communities, saying that whereas the former “evangelize to bring people together with peace in their hearts; to teach people to trust God and accept his will,” the latter “accompany the people; to denounce injustice and raise the people’s consciousness” (p. 146).

^{iv} For an in-depth treatment of restorative or generative shame, see Casey & Watkins (2014) *Up Against the Wall: Re-Imagining the U.S.-Mexico Border*.

^{ix} Many accompany others in what are existential aspects of human life: birth, loss, sickness, death. Psychosocial and existential accompaniment overlap significantly, while the former tends to situations that are profoundly impacted by collective social and environmental trauma.