

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES AND TERTIARY EDUCATION IN CANADA: INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Verna J. Kirkness
University of British Columbia,
Vancouver, Canada

Abstract

Aboriginal Peoples have been historically under-represented in the ranks of college and university graduates in Canada. From an institutional perspective, the problem has been typically defined in terms of low achievement, high attrition, poor retention, weak persistence, etc., thus placing the onus for adjustment on the student. From the perspective of the Aboriginal student, however, the institution is viewed as a hostile environment which does not respect them for who they are, is not relevant to their outlook of the world, and is rigid and resistant to accommodation Aboriginal Peoples, thus limiting their access and participation in institutions of higher learning. The implications of these differences will be discussed, along with the identification of ways in which initiatives within tertiary institutions can change the hostile environment to user-friendly environments for Aboriginal Peoples.

Universities and colleges generally have adopted the political rhetoric of "equal opportunity for all". This would suggest that all peoples regardless of colour, social status or place of residence would be fairly and proportionately represented in these institutions of higher learning. We all know that this is not the case. In fact, in the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Report entitled *Universities Under Scrutiny* (1987). Canada is quoted as stating that "in general, despite government policies and programs designed to make tertiary education accessible to the whole spectrum of society, the children of upper-middle and middle class parents are overrepresented at university. The report further states that "universities in general do not consider the social class origins of their students as a relevant factor in their admission and internal policies".

This will explain, in part, why Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, who are said to be the lowest on the socio-economic scale, have historically been under-represented in the ranks of the graduates in colleges and universities in Canada. Twenty years ago (1975-76), less than one per cent (.88%) of the Aboriginal status population was enrolled in colleges and universities (INAC, 1989). In 1988-89, the enrolment had risen to just over three per

cent (MacPherson, 1991) which is still far below the national average.

To understand this phenomenon, two things must be considered. One is the legacy of Aboriginal education in Canada and the other is the problem of the Ivory Tower syndrome perpetuated by higher education institutions.

What follows is a brief overview outlining the chronology of the Aboriginal experience which has been described as a national tragedy. For this paper, I will confine my remarks to those Aboriginal Peoples who are recognized by the Government of Canada as "Indians". (The Indian Act defines an Indian as "a person who pursuant to this Act is registered as an Indian or entitled to be registered as an Indian".)

It is possible to find many accounts of Aboriginal education in Canada, most of which begin with contact with Europeans. It is important to acknowledge that long before Europeans arrived in North America, Indians as we were known at the time, had evolved their own form of education. It was an education in which the community and the natural environment were the classroom, and the land was seen as the mother of the people. Members of the community were the teachers, and each adult was responsible for ensuring that each child learned to live a good life (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992).

Traditionally, education was largely, an informal process that provided the young with the specific skills, attitudes, knowledge and values required to function in everyday life. The development of the whole person was emphasized through teachings that were often shared in storytelling using "tricksters of learning" (Archibald, 1990) through which children learned such values as humility, honesty, courage, kindness and respect.

Boys and girls were taught at an early age to observe and to utilize, to cope with and respect, their environment. Through observation and practice, young children learned child rearing practices and the art of hunting, trapping, fishing, farming, food gathering and preparation, building shelters. Central to the teachings was the belief in the sacred, the Great Spirit, which guided the way the people thought, felt and perceived their world (Kirkness & Bowman, 1992). It was "a natural process occurring during everyday activities....ensuring cultural continuity and survival of the mental, spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of the cultural unit and of its environment." (Armstrong 1987).

This approach to education was drastically changed over the centuries in which education was provided by missionaries and the federal and provincial governments. Beginning at the early part of the 17th

Century, missionaries were brought over from Europe to establish schools for Indians. This was believed to be the best method of bringing Christian civilization to the heathen "Natives". Day schools were the first to be established but were soon abandoned in favour of boarding schools. The period from around 1870 to the early 1980's in which boarding/residential schools operated in Canada is considered the time of greatest oppression for our people, a period of cultural disruption marked by efforts of assimilation which today are viewed more as tactics of extermination. Chrisjohn (1993) describes the residential school experience as draconian. He states:

Even for their time, the normative operations of residential schools were draconian. Discipline could involve physical abuse, withholding food, or exposure to the elements; children were beaten for speaking their own language, for associating with children of the opposite sex, or for minor infractions of school protocol; school facilities and educational materials were often substandard, with inadequate health and living facilities and with standards of nutrition ignored; and on and on. All of these features must be set against the backdrop of a world where the children were removed (sometimes at incredible distances) from home and family for extended periods of time; placed under penalty of law, in the hands of people ill-disposed toward them and their way of life; maintained often at minimal levels of sustenance, with no avenue of complaint or possibility of redress.

The result of all this is that generations to follow have been affected by this tragic interruption of culture resulting in the breakdown of our societies. Today, our people suffer from high rates of suicide, substance abuse, unemployment, family violence and breakdown, incarceration and educational failure.

While residential schools continued to exist into the 1980s, along with Indian Day Schools operated by the Department of Indian Affairs, the government took another tack in educating Aboriginal children in the latter 1950s into the 1960s. The approach was to "civilize and Christianize" the Indians through a policy of integration. Children were to attend public schools with non-Indian children. Canada at its highest point succeeded in making provision for approximately 60% (about 43% today) of Aboriginal students in public schools.

In discussing integration in the 1972 policy of Indian Control of Indian Education, it was noted that:

Integration in the past twenty years has simply meant the closing down of Indian

schools and transferring Indian students to schools away from the Reserves, often against the wishes of Indian parents. The acceleration with which this program has developed has not taken into account the fact that neither Indian parents and children, nor the white community: parents, children and schools, were prepared for integration, or able to cope with the many problems which were created.

The integration program began and continued with little or no consultation with Aboriginal parents, their Bands or organizations. No particular preparation of teachers or curriculum was made to accommodate the Aboriginal children.

The late Chief Dan George (n.d.) in one of his famous soliloquies, "A Talk to Teachers" commented on integration. He stated:

You talk big words of integration in the schools. Does it really exist? Can we talk of integration until there is social integration?...Unless there is integration of hearts and minds you have only a physical presence...and the walls are as high as the mountain range.

Integration has failed to provide a meaningful education for Aboriginal children. Studies on the effects of integration have shown that Aboriginal children reveal patterns that can be identified as alienation and identity conflict. The Aboriginal student is caught between two cultures and is, therefore, literally outside of and between, both.

Amid residential, federal Indian Day schools and integrated schooling, the Aboriginal leaders in 1972 presented to the federal government, a policy document entitled "Indian Control of Indian Education." This national landmark policy was based on two education principles recognized in Canadian society: parental responsibility and local control. It recognizes that Indian parents must enjoy the same fundamental decision-making rights about their children's education as other parents across Canada (Manuel, 1974).

The policy was prompted by the concern of parents for the continuing academic failure experiences by their children and by the need to improve the quality of Indian education. The need for an education relevant to the philosophy and values of Indian people was considered to be essential. Chief George Manuel, the President at the time, of the National Indian Brotherhood (now known as the Assembly of First Nations) responsible for the creation of the policy stated:

Instead of a one-sided view of history, First Nations want their children to learn a Canadian history that honours their customs, values, accomplishments and contributions. We want our children to learn science and technology so that they can promote the harmony of man with nature...not destroy it. We want our children to learn about other peoples in literature and social studies, and in the process to learn to respect the values and cultures of others. Our philosophy of learning and teaching are an integral part of living, both for the teacher and the child. It is not a five hour, five day a week exercise for a dozen years or so. It is a lifelong commitment (Manuel, 1974).

The policy of Indian Control of Indian Education has been in place for over two decades. While its implementation has been beset with many problems over the years, the effect of parental responsibility and local control has clearly brought about positive changes. These include an increase in the number of Aboriginal students completing high school and entering universities and colleges, an increasing number of Aboriginal teachers and increasingly more research is being done by Aboriginal scholars to identify effective pedagogy in Aboriginal education. As well, the problems and challenges associated with the implementation of ICIE are becoming clearer as attempts are being made to resolve them.

In terms of tertiary education, the 1972 policy of ICIE was very clear. It stated: "Considering the great need there is for professional people in Indian communities, every effort should be made to encourage and assist Indian students to succeed in post-secondary studies". The policy spoke to the need for universities to examine their entrance requirements, instituting pre-university programs, providing counselling and tutoring and recognizing Indian languages. It called upon universities to ensure that Native studies had a respected place in the curriculum.

Since 1972, the need for a university education for Aboriginal Peoples has intensified as the goal for Aboriginal self-government and the settling of land claims have become a high priority.

While the numbers of Aboriginal students in universities and colleges in Canada has increased markedly, the situation is far from ideal. Earlier in this paper, I mentioned that one reason for low enrolment had to do with Aboriginal Peoples' experience with formal education provided by missionaries and governments over a period of three hundred years. The other reason was the "Ivory Tower" syndrome perpetuated, most particularly by universities.

Universities are by nature elitist. While espousing multicultural

education and such rhetoric as "equal opportunity for all" or "It's Yours", they are designed for the upper and middle class Caucasian population. Dr. Kogila A. Moodley (1992) of the University of British Columbia, in addressing university education makes this observation. "As long as education continues in this vein, de-emphasizing access, multicultural education will continue to arouse an interminable debate. To be meaningful, the practice of multiculturalism must focus on the special needs of specific minorities, as opposed to overall cultural programming which often only reproduces the cultural hierarchy".

Therefore, from the vantage point of the university, students are generally viewed as coming to partake of what the university has to offer.¹ From this perspective, it is presumed that the university is an established institution with its own long-standing, deeply rooted policies, practices, programs and standards intended to serve the needs of the society in which it is embedded. Students who come to the university are expected to adapt to its modus operandi if they wish to obtain the benefits (usually translated to mean better, higher paying jobs) of the knowledge and skills it has to offer, the desirability and value of which are presumed to be self-evident.

When particular clusters of students, such as those from Aboriginal backgrounds do not readily adapt to conventional institutional norms and expectations and do not achieve levels of "success" comparable to other students, the typical response is to focus on the aberrant students and to intensify efforts at socializing them into the institutional milieu. The lack-of performance issues in such circumstances tend to be defined by the university in terms such as "low achievement," "high attrition," "poor retention," "weak persistence", etc, thus placing the onus for accommodation on the students and fortifying the entrenched nature of the university as an institution.

The institutional response has typically been to intensify the pressure on the Aboriginal students to adapt and become integrated into the institutions social fabric, with the ultimate goal that they will be "retained" until they graduate. Special advising and counselling, bridging and developmental programs and an array of student services have been introduced. While these kinds of initiatives have assisted Aboriginal students to some degree, to make the transition to the institution, it has fallen far short of acknowledging the home culture of the students. As in the case of elementary and high school education, the university must recognize, respect, and build upon the cultural integrity of the student.

The university must be able to present itself in ways that have

instrumental value to Aboriginal students; that is, the programs and services that are offered must connect with the students' own aspirations and cultural dispositions sufficiently to achieve a comfort level that will make the experience worth enduring. If it cannot create an environment in which Aboriginal students begin to "feel at home" in the university, all the special programs and support services offered will be of little value in attracting and holding them in significant numbers. Attending the university is not an all-or-nothing proposition, and many students will move in and out of the university over a period of many years, depending on how well it suits their purposes.

While job opportunities alone may be sufficient motivation to keep some students interested, in the case of many Aboriginal students, these "jobs" are often linked to aspirations with much broader collective/tribal considerations, such as exercising self-government or bringing Aboriginal perspectives to bear in professional and policy-making arenas.

In an effort to sustain their own cultural integrity, there is an urgent need for Aboriginal People to assume roles as teachers, doctors, lawyers, administrators, comptrollers, architects, historians, etc. This need is reflected in an observation made by Chief Simon Baker and elder from the Squamish Nation in British Columbia who has often pointed out that, "Having White lawyers running your band government is not Aboriginal self-government".

The question that Aboriginal Peoples and tertiary education institutions must address with urgency is, "How can the monolithic Ivory Tower be reoriented to make its vast resources more accessible to Aboriginal peoples and their communities?" This is the question that challenges us today as we try to domesticate the Ivory Tower so that Aboriginal peoples can access the university in significant numbers to meet our needs.

Some of the most compelling problems have to do with the institutions lack of respect for our people not just as individuals but more fundamentally as a people, the lack of relevance in the curriculum, the insensitivity toward developing reciprocal relationships between professors and students and finally, the failure to acknowledge the desire of Aboriginal peoples to claim responsibility through participation within the university structure.

According to many Aboriginal students, respect is an issue in the content presented, the issues advanced and how research about Aboriginal peoples is conducted. Little of what they bring in a way of cultural

knowledge, traditions and core values is recognized, much less respected.

One of the greatest frustrations of Aboriginal students occurs in anthropology where often they experience the denigration of their people and when they attempt to present their point of view of question the accuracy of the information, they are often ignored or belittled. An example of an extreme case of disrespect was documented in a Masters thesis by Sheila Te Hennepe (CJNE, 1993) entitled "Issues of Respect: Reflections of First Nations Students' Experiences in Postsecondary Anthropology Classrooms." One of the students participating in the study reported that an anthropology professor of hers dressed up as a shaman. She reported, "My prof dressed up like a shaman and then the class was supposed to ask him questions. He had a paper head band with a paper feather in it and a green shawl over his shoulders. " She explained that her reaction to this violation was..."to pretend it wasn't happening. I told myself that it wasn't really. He is just doing something but it isn't real. There was another Native woman in the class and she just kept looking at me. We went for coffee and she couldn't stop crying".

Another way in which respect is in question in the university is in its view of what constitutes the literate world and whose knowledge is considered valid and worthy of citation as references. The university is a literate world in which only decontextualized literate knowledge counts. The fact that Aboriginal peoples value oral knowledge is of little consequence to the university. Students' who cite oral knowledge in their research are often told that it is not valid knowledge and that they should search the libraries for other sources. If universities are to respect the cultural integrity of Aboriginal students and their communities, they must adopt a posture that goes beyond the usual generation and conveyance of literate knowledge and include the institutional legitimization of indigenous knowledge and skills not derived from books. Such a responsibility requires an institutional respect for indigenous knowledge, as well as an ability to help students to appreciate and build upon their customary forms of consciousness and representation as they expand their understanding of the world in which they live.

The complexity of the task of incorporating oral knowledge in the everyday functioning of the (literate) university is now receiving assistance from an emerging group of Aboriginal scholars. Among them is Jo-ann Archibald, a member of the Stailo Nation in British Columbia who is attempting to reconcile differences in the way knowledge is understood and conveyed in a contrastive study of orality and literacy. She observes:

With the technological advances of video, television and film our world has become a combined oral/literate/visual one. This combination has exciting possibilities for First Nations because it is nearing the traditional holistic learning approach to teaching and learning which is needed to heal our people who have been adversely affected by history. (1990).

Dr Eber Hampton (1988), a Chickasaw originally from Oklahoma and now President of the Saskatchewan Indian Federal College has made an effort to identify some of the qualities that he considers important in the move to construct an "Indian theory of education." He lists the following as "twelve" standards on which to judge any such effort.

- Spirituality - an appreciation for spiritual relationships.
- Service - the purpose of education is to contribute to the people.
- Diversity - Indian education must meet the standards of diverse tribes and communities.
- Culture - the importance of culturally determined ways of thinking, communicating and living.
- Tradition - continuity with tradition.
- Respect - the relationship between the individual and the group recognized as mutually empowering.
- History - appreciation of the facts of Indian history, including the loss of the continent and continuing racial and political oppression.
- Relentlessness - commitment to the struggle for good schools for Indian children.
- Vitality - recognition of the strength of Indian people and culture.
- Conflict - understanding the dynamics and consequences of oppression.
- Place - the importance of sense of place, land and territory.
- Transformation - commitment to personal and societal change.

Such a list of qualities begins to offer universities (and schools) a set of standard against which to examine their policies and practices to see how respectful and relevant they really are to Aboriginal considerations. While Hampton's set of standards may differ from those against which the university is accustomed to being judged, it is in fact a more inclusive list of criteria whereby all students can find something with which to identify. To the extent that universities are able to construct themselves to be more

relevant to and accepting of Aboriginal students' perspectives and experiences, they will be much more relevant and responsive to the needs of all students.

Another frustrating aspect of the university experience for Aboriginal students is the role dichotomy between the producers and the consumers of knowledge in university settings. The conventional institutionalized roles of a university faculty member as the creator and dispenser of knowledge and expertise and the student as the passive recipient of that knowledge and expertise have a tendency to interfere with the establishment of the kinds of human relationships to which Aboriginal students are most likely to respond. Within the Aboriginal experience participation of each individual as both teacher and learner is practised alternately throughout their lifetime.

If faculty members were to have reciprocal relationships, they would be able to create a new kind of education, formulate new paradigms that would lead to greater equilibrium and congruence between the literate view of the world and the reality outside the Ivory Tower. After all, education is not only instilling knowledge but awakening the creative potential within each one of us, enabling us to develop to our fullest potential, and better contribute to the societies we live in (Delors, 1993).

In 1972, through the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education, Aboriginal Peoples clearly articulated their desire to be involved in a meaningful context with the advancement of their peoples' education. It was noted that the fundamental concept of local control (parental responsibility) was what "distinguished the free political system of democratic governments from those of a totalitarian nature." For tertiary institutions, this means being part of the decision-making body through representation on governing boards and advisory councils of universities as well as federal and provincial government boards, councils and commissions concerned with tertiary education in general and/or Aboriginal education in particular.

Aboriginal peoples recognize that access to tertiary institutions means more than gaining an education, it means gaining access to power, authority, and an opportunity to exercise control over the affairs of everyday life. This control is usually taken for granted by non-Aboriginal peoples.

Clearly, comprehensive reform has not spread like wildfire through campuses, since the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education was adopted, but neither has the status quo remained unaffected. The most

promising sign on the horizon of Aboriginal peoples exercising responsibility and increasing participation in the arena of higher education is the burgeoning number of Aboriginal post-secondary/adult education initiatives, both within and outside existing institutions across Canada. Examples range from independent institutions such as tribal colleges (Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, Yellowquill Tribal College, Red Crow Community College), affiliated relationships such as the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College with the University of Regina and the Gabriel Dumont Institute, with the Universities of Regina and Saskatchewan and integrated structures such as the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia, and various Native Studies departments and Native teacher education programs which are part of universities all across Canada (Barnhardt, 1991).

The structure and focus of each of these institutions vary greatly, with services aimed at clientele ranging from the local community to national levels and the program emphasis ranging from adult and vocational education to graduate level programs. Typical program offerings are in the areas of rural/community/economic development, Aboriginal law, self-government, land claims and resources management, teacher education, health and social services, Aboriginal language revitalization, adult literacy, performing and creative arts, and journalism. Underlying all of these programs and institutions, is an explicit commitment to culturally appropriate, readily accessible, quality education for Aboriginal peoples.

Our challenge to reconstruct and transform tertiary institutions into friendly environments to better serve Aboriginal peoples is, indeed, a daunting task. At the heart of Aboriginal participation in higher education, is the notion of empowerment, not just as individuals but more importantly, as nations and as a people.

What we will not continue to accept is a lesser education, nor do we seek an equal education, but rather a better education - an education that respects us for who we are, that is relevant to our view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships to us and that helps us to exercise responsibility over our lives and those of our people.

It is not enough for colleges and universities to focus their attention on "attrition" and "retention" as an excuse to intensify efforts at cultural assimilation. Such approaches in themselves have not made a significant difference, and have often resulted in further alienation. Instead, the very nature and purpose of higher education must be reconsidered and major shifts in policy, posture and practices of actually working with

Aboriginal peoples must be made. When this happens, we will find that the entire institution, as well as society as a whole will be strengthened and everyone will benefit.

References

- Archibald, Jo-ann (1990). Coyote's Story About Orality and Literacy, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 17 (2), 66-81.
- Armstrong, Jeannette C. (1987). Traditional Indigenous Education: A Natural Process, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 14 (3), 14-19.
- Barnhardt, R. (1991). Higher Education in the Fourth World: Indigenous Peoples Take Control, Tribal Colleges: *Journal of American Indian Higher Education*, Autumn.
- Chrisjohn, Roland & Young, Sherri L. (1993). "Among School Children": Psychological Imperialism and the Residential School Experience in Canada, unpublished paper. (To become part of The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report scheduled for release in late 1995).
- Delors, Jacques (1993). Speech by chairman, Jacques Delors, International Commission on Education for the Twenty-First Century, UNESCO, Paris
- George, Chief Dan (n.d.) "A talk to Teachers", Unpublished soliloquy, British Columbia.
- Hampton, Eber (1988). *Toward a Redefinition of American Indian/Alaska Native Education*, Doctoral Dissertation, Harvard University.
- Indian Act, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (1951) Queen's Printer, Ottawa, Canada.
- Annual Report, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (1989). Queen's Printer, Ottawa, Canada.
- Kirkness, Verna J. & Barnhardt, Ray (1991) First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's - Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 30 (3), 1-15.
- Kirkness, Verna J. & Bowman, Sheena Selkirk (1992). *First Nations and Schools: Triumphs and Struggles*, Canadian Education Association, Toronto, Canada.
- MacPherson, James C. (1991) *MacPherson Report on Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future*, Department of Indian

- Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa, Canada.
- Manuel, George (1974). *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, Collier-MacMillan, Toronto, Canada.
- Moodley, Kogila A. (1992) Ethnicity, Power, Politics in Minority Education. In *Beyond Multicultural Education-International Perspectives*, Detselig Enterprises Ltd, Calgary, Alberta.
- National Indian Brotherhood (1972). *Indian Control of Education*, Assembly of First Nations, Ottawa, Canada.
- Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (1987). *Universities Under Scrutiny*, UNESCO, Paris.
- TeHennepe Sheila (1993). Issues of Respect: Reflections of First Nations Students in Postsecondary Anthropology Classrooms, *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 20 (2), 193-260.

Endnotes

¹The remainder of this paper draws heavily on a previously published paper entitled First Nations and Higher Education: The Four R's -- Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility written by my colleague Ray Barnhardt and myself. See references.

LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA

Itesh Sachdev

**Department of Applied Linguistics, Birkbeck College
University of London, London, U.K.**

Abstract

This paper explores the dimensions of the ethnolinguistic identity and vitality of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Language data from the 1991 Canadian Census as well as other data from governmental, non-governmental and Aboriginal sources are discussed in the context of a social psychological framework of language maintenance and shift. It is concluded that societal empowerment of Aboriginal Peoples is urgently necessary and should include an explicit constitutional recognition of their **linguistic rights**.

Introduction

"...should be brought to compete with his fellow whites, but in order that this may be done effectually he must be taught the English language. So long as he keeps his native tongue...will he remain a community apart...with this end in view children...be taught in the English language exclusively..." (Department of Indian Affairs, 1895, cited in Gardner & Jimmie, 1989, p. 7)

"Language is our unique relationship to the Creator, our attitudes beliefs, values, and fundamental notions of what is truth. Our languages are the cornerstone of who we are as a People. Without our languages we cannot survive."(Assembly of First Nations, 1990, p. 39)

In precolonial times, Aboriginal languages flourished within the boundaries of what is now Canada (and U.S.A). Many Aboriginal people were multilingual (Hebert, 1984) and for several millennia, their languages were the main means by which culture, identity and spirituality were articulated, shared and passed on to successive generations. Late in the current millennium, in a relatively short period of European colonisation, a much cited recent study alarmingly concluded that only three out of fifty-three Aboriginal languages had an "excellent chance of survival" by virtue of having more than five thousand speakers, while the rest were endangered with some verging on extinction (Foster, 1982). Critiques of this narrow demographic approach have painted a more complex picture, arguing that the likelihood of survival of languages should not be based on the sheer numbers

of speakers, especially as small but linguistically thriving Aboriginal communities may be denied access to supportive resources (see Assembly of First Nations, 1990). The aim of this paper is to introduce a social psychological framework for exploring the identities and "ethnolinguistic vitalities" (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977) of Aboriginal groups in Canada using data from a variety of governmental and non-governmental statistical sources.

A vast amount of social psychological literature demonstrates that linguistic criteria function as important markers of social categories at all levels of linguistic variation (see Giles, Scherer & Taylor, 1979; Giles & Coupland, 1991 for reviews). In analyses of ethnic and national groups, there exists a substantial body of literature suggesting that language is among the most salient dimensions of group identity (e.g. Giles, 1977; Gudykunst & Schmidt, 1987; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1990; cf. Edwards, 1994). For instance, results of early studies using multidimensional scaling procedures have shown that ethnolinguistic group members identified more closely with those who spoke their native tongue than with those who shared their cultural background or geographic origin (e.g. Taylor, Bassili & Aboud, 1973; Giles, Taylor & Bourhis, 1977). That language is often *the* central criterial attribute for group identity is evident even from a cursory review of intergroup relations in numerous countries around the world including Canada, Russia, Spain, Belgium, India, Malaysia, Finland, etc (see Fishman, 1989; Giles, 1977; Ros, Cano & Huici, 1987; Liebkind, 1982; Bourhis, 1984). Moreover, much of the social psychological research cited above suggests that language use and identity appear to be related reciprocally: language use influences the formation of group identity and group identity influences patterns of language attitudes and usage.

It is not only actual language use and proficiency that is associated with identity. Ancestral languages may also be valued aspects of group identity despite not being spoken by most group members. The revival of ancestral languages may become a central issue around which group members mobilise to affirm or redefine their group identities (Ross, 1979; Bourhis, 1984b; Giles & Johnson, 1981). Perhaps one of most celebrated cases of successful language revival in the modern world has been that of Hebrew, considered by many to be a "dead" language just half a century ago in Palestine (Blanc, 1968; but see Edwards, 1985). However, by 1961, Israeli Census figures showed that 75% of the Jewish population had stated that Hebrew was their main or only language of daily communication (Blanc, 1968). The Hebrew language revival was directly related to the establishment

of the State of Israel (Fishman, 1989). In a related vein, Spolsky (1989) cites a more recent dramatic example of indigenous language revival, supported by favourable language planning within existing state boundaries:

Where six years ago a bare handful of children came to primary school with any knowledge of the Maori language, now each year between two and three thousand children, many of them fluent bilinguals, start school after having already been exposed to daily use of the Maori language for three or more years. (p. 91)

Like the other groups discussed above, language is also considered to be central to Aboriginal identity in Canada with many suggesting that fluency in Aboriginal languages is an essential contributor to self-determination in addition to being a consequence of by it (e.g. Brandt & Ayongman, 1989; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; Kirkness, 1989; AFN, 1990 - quote above). Indeed, the fact that Aboriginal languages have not been completely eradicated despite the long-term and cruel enforcement of 'English - only' government educational policies is testimony not only to the depth of Aboriginal resistance, but also to the importance of Aboriginal languages to Aboriginal identity.

In order to place social identity (and other social psychological) processes underlying ethnolinguistic behaviour in their appropriate sociostructural contexts Giles et al (1977) introduced the notion of *Ethnolinguistic Vitality*. It was defined as "that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations" (p. 306). Giles et al. (1977) proposed that groups' strengths and weaknesses on dimensions of institutional support and control as well its social status and demographic strength may be assessed "objectively" to provide a rough overall classification of ethnolinguistic groups as having low, medium or high vitality. It was argued that the more vitality an ethnolinguistic group has the more likely it would be to survive as a distinctive linguistic collectivity in intergroup settings. Conversely, groups that have little or no group vitality were expected to assimilate linguistically or cease to exist as distinctive groups.

Since its introduction, the construct of ethnolinguistic vitality has received a considerable amount of theoretical and empirical attention (see Landry & Allard, 1994a; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1993; Harwood, Giles & Bourhis, 1994). However, since no studies to date have applied this framework to Aboriginal contexts in Canada, this paper provides a preliminary vitality analysis of the Aboriginal language situation in Canada. In this exploratory analysis distinctions between Aboriginal languages are not made as the major aim is to consider their situation as a whole vis-a-vis non-

Aboriginal languages in Canada. Undoubtedly, future analyses would need to consider the distinctive vitalities of different Aboriginal groups across Canada. It should also be noted that this paper does not discuss the Inuit who have been the focus of some social psychological research (e.g. Taylor, Wright, Ruggiero & Aitchison, 1993). Before outlining a vitality analysis, some methodological points about the quality of available data are worthy of mention.

The 'objective' vitality of Aboriginal groups in Canada may be assessed from a variety of governmental and non-governmental sources. However, inferences from such available statistical data on Aboriginal peoples in Canada must be made cautiously (Wright, 1993). Although the precise reasons for this may vary depending on the data set, they are a function of factors associated with the agency collecting the data and respondents' perceptions and behaviour. Apart from the reluctance of several Aboriginal communities to participate in data collection, different data gathering agencies use different criteria for defining Aboriginal people. Data collected by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND) is primarily restricted to those Aboriginals who have legal status as 'Registered Indians' and/or Inuit. However, ethnic origin data in the national Census are based on self-identification, making it difficult to compare Census data with DIAND data in order to draw accurate inferences.

The comparability of data from successive Censuses is also problematic due to the changes in the phrasing and definitions of ethnic origin questions. For instance, Wright (1993) reports that the forty-five percent increase between the 1981 and 1986 Census data (491,460 to 711,720) may primarily be attributable to the fact that only single Aboriginal origins were permitted in 1981, but multiple responses (and origins) were allowed in 1986. Interestingly, the 1991 Census data (Statistics Canada, 1993a) also reveal a large increase (41% - to 1,002,675) in the size of the Aboriginal population in the five year period following the 1986 Census. An increase of this magnitude can neither be attributed to demographic factors such as changes in fertility, nor to the phrasing of the question, as there were few differences between the 1991 and 1986 versions. Explanations of increases of this magnitude may have to unravel how significant social, political and economic events have affected the perceptions, attitudes and identities of respondents in the intervening years.

The perceptions and understanding of respondents, affected by their personal (and social) circumstances may also affect their actual responses on self-identification measures. For instance, Jarvis and Heaton (1989) reported

that some Aboriginal respondents, may have claimed official 'Indian' status even when they had legally lost such status, while others who were probably entitled to claim official status did not. Interestingly, some respondents originating from India also claimed 'Registered Indian' status (Jarvis & Heaton, 1989). Clearly the 'objectivity' of statistics based on self-identifications is somewhat questionable (see Wright, 1993).

Caution should also be exercised in interpreting language data obtained by the Canadian Census due to the variations in the method of obtaining data, definitions of languages (and dialects), mother-tongues and the particular questions asked concerning language use and proficiency (e.g. Edwards, 1994). For instance, Jarvis and Heaton (1989) argue that it was only after the 1981 Census used additional (and refined) questions that it became possible to statistically analyze patterns in Aboriginal language *shift* in Canada. Language shift was defined as the proportion of those respondents who spoke an Aboriginal language at birth and now used some other language as the main language in the home. However, analyses of recent Census data using appropriate questions (and definitions) have not eliminated discrepancies in assessment of language shift and retention rates. The recent Assembly of First Nations (1990) large-scale survey of Aboriginal across Canada suggested that the Census data had vastly underestimated language retention rates in ten out of twelve communities under comparison. Since an understanding of language shift and retention (as well as other sociolinguistic phenomena) needs to be contextualised in its appropriate sociostructural framework, an outline vitality analysis in terms of demographic, status and institutional support is presented next.

Demographic Vitality

According to Giles et al. (1977) demographic vitality factors relate to the sheer numbers of ethnolinguistic group members and their distribution throughout a particular urban, regional or national territory. Demographic variables also include group rates of immigration, emigration, endogamy and birthrate. Favourable demographic factors may be used by ethnolinguistic groups as a legitimising tool to empower them with institutional control and bolster their overall group vitality (e.g. the black majority in S. Africa under apartheid).

Aboriginal people constituted the majority of the population in Canada probably until the middle of the last century (e.g. Denevan, 1976). Since then, European expansion involving warfare, the spread of disease, land alienation, displacement, isolation in reservation systems, enforced assimilation and various other governmental measures including large-scale

non-Aboriginal immigration, has led to a situation where Aboriginal peoples comprise only between three and four percent of the population of Canada today (Statistics Canada, 1993a; Perley, 1993). Moreover, with the exception of the Inuit, Aboriginal language speakers in Canada have no major pool of potential speakers outside of Canada to draw upon to increase their numbers.

Analysis of the 1991 Census question on ethnic origins obtained information about those respondents reporting any "North American Indian, Metis or Inuit" origins (Single and multiple, Statistics Canada, 1993a). As shown in Table 1, by far the largest number of respondents reported "North American Indian" origins. Metis and Inuit origins were reported by a smaller proportion of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Following the Census, a large-scale survey - the Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS, Statistics Canada, 1993b) - of a sample of persons who reported Aboriginal origins was conducted asking more detailed information about language, education, culture, employment, housing and other characteristics of Aboriginal peoples. As shown in Table 1, the post-Censal APS (1991, Statistics Canada, 1993b) which focused on those who "identified with an Aboriginal group" represented approximately 63% of those respondents who in the 1991 Census of the Canadian population reported having at least one Aboriginal origin. The Inuit reported the highest levels of identification, while the other Aboriginal groups reported roughly comparable levels of identification (Table 1). From a social psychological perspective, the collection of data amongst Aboriginals who actually reported identifying with an Aboriginal group was timely, given the primacy accorded to group identity in the discussion above.

Table 1
Ethnic Origins and Identifications according to 1991 Official Statistics

Aboriginal group	Ethnic Origins - 1991 Census	Identifications - 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey
`North American Indian'	783980	460680 (59% of Census)
`Metis'	212650	135260 (64% of Census)
`Inuit'	49255	36215 (74% of Census)
TOTAL	1045885 ¹	625710

¹ The Census figures are somewhat inflated (from 1002675) due to the multiple counting of those

reporting multiple origins (Sources: Statistics Canada, 1993a, 1993b).

Barsh's (1994) analysis of available 1991 APS and Census data suggests that the current Aboriginal population is younger and has higher fertility rates than the national average. Aboriginal peoples also constitute the majority in the sparsely populated regions of northern Canada (except the Atlantic Coast) but not in southern Canada. Barsh also reports that a rapid increase in migration to urban areas in recent times (1960s and 1970s) has led a majority (64%) of Aboriginal peoples to be 'dispersed' (i.e. not living on government designated "Indian Reserves" and settlements). The largest concentrations of Aboriginal people in urban centres are to be found in Winnipeg, Edmonton and Vancouver, although it is noteworthy that they do not exceed five percent of these cities' populations (Statistics Canada, 1993a, 1993b).

Overall the demographic vitality of Aboriginal peoples may be considered to be low (though increasing) when taken as a whole across Canada but varies considerably depending on the region. Previous studies predicting the demise of Aboriginal languages (e.g. Foster, 1982; see Edwards, 1994) categorised the chances of survival of different Aboriginal languages in terms of sheer numbers without allowing for the impact of other relevant demographic variables identified in the vitality analysis of Giles et al (1977). The use of data available from the national Census and other sources may allow significantly more sophisticated analyses given that Census data show large regional (and other) differences in the number and size of Aboriginal communities in Canada. The 1991 Census and APS data suggest that Aboriginal demographic vitality may well be considered to be at moderate levels on the southern Prairies, and high levels in Northern Canada.

Institutional support/control and status vitality

Institutional support/control factors refer to the extent to which an ethnolinguistic group enjoys representation in, and control over, the various institutions of a community, region or nation. Giles et al. (1977) proposed that all forms of formal and informal representation in, and control over, religious, educational, political, media and cultural contexts contribute to groups' institutional support and overall vitality.

Status factors, less readily quantifiable than demographic and institutional support factors, are those pertaining to an ethnolinguistic group's social prestige, its economic and sociohistorical status as well as the status of its language and culture locally and internationally. Ethnolinguistic groups which have high institutional support/control and high demographic strength

are likely to enjoy considerable social status relative to less dominant and minority groups in society.

European colonisation of North America aimed to totally assimilate Aboriginal peoples and deny them any vitality either on institutional support and control or status dimensions. It was accompanied by a powerful racist ideology which characterised Aboriginal people as 'uncivilised', 'barbarian' and 'backward' (e.g. Kaegi, 1972; Perley, 1993). The last one hundred and fifty years have seen perhaps the most deliberate and cruel governmental policies, implemented by various educational agencies, and several religious and missionary groups, designed to eradicate Aboriginal languages and cultures in North America (e.g. see Perley, 1993; Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; also see Stevenson, 1995).

A system of segregated schooling (industrial, residential, boarding) for Aboriginal peoples was well in place before Canadian confederation in 1867 (e.g. Barman, Hebert & McCaskill, 1986; Ing, 1991). The early schools were run by various religious groups intent on assimilating and "civilising" Aboriginal peoples. In terms of language education this meant the teaching and use of English (or French) accompanied by a derogation of, and often severe punishment for even the minimal use of Aboriginal languages (e.g. Gardner & Jimmie, 1989). Following Confederation the situation changed little with the newly created federal "Department of Indian Affairs" (DIA) taking overall responsibility for Aboriginal education, but essentially continuing (and even expanding) previous assimilation efforts of the missionaries and governmental agencies. Perley (1993) argues that there was little change in the policy of devaluing Aboriginal languages and cultures either when the federal government took direct control of the residential schools (previously operated by missionaries) in the 1940s, or when it moved to the establishment of day schools on reserves. This policy of assimilation continued with the introduction of 'integrated' (i.e. with non-Aboriginals), 'English-only' schooling for Aboriginal children in the 1950s.

In 1969, without explicitly acknowledging previously assimilationistic policies, the Canadian Government published a white paper proposing the phasing out of government responsibility and authority for 'Indian affairs' to local Aboriginal groups and provincial governments, with all educational services to be provided by the provinces (Gardner & Jimmie, 1989). This paper also indicated a complete turn-around from a policy of 'linguistic imperialism' (Phillipson, 1992) that overtly suppressed Aboriginal languages to one where Aboriginal languages and cultures were to be 'valued, encouraged and assisted'. Gardner and Jimmie (1989) provide a powerful

analysis of the failure of this policy due to a severe lack in the provision of the means and resources to implement Aboriginal cultural and language programs in the curriculum. Aboriginal opposition to the white paper led the government to accept (in principle) a policy of "Indian Control of Indian Education" (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Although this policy made important strides in helping to revitalize Aboriginal languages and to valorise identification with Aboriginal communities, educational, financial and political constraints imposed by federal and provincial governments have severely impeded change and reinforced the low status ascribed to Aboriginal languages (e.g. Gardner & Jimmie, 1989; AFN, 1990).

In a recent survey across 593 First Nations communities covering a population of about half a million people, AFN (1990) reported that Aboriginal language instruction was available to less than half of all First Nations students. It was generally not available in the provincial school system (except in a few bilingual programmes in Ontario and immersion programmes in Quebec) even though approximately half of all First Nations students were enrolled in the provincial system. Aboriginal language instruction was found to be largely reserve based, available only as a subject for an average of two hours per week, and largely confined to the lower elementary grades. In financial terms, the AFN (1990) estimated that the federal government spent only 2 million Canadian dollars on 262 language retention programmes for over fifty Aboriginal languages between 1983-87, but a massive 626 million Canadian dollars promoting official bilingualism and official minority language rights in 1989-90.

The status and institutional support of languages in modern Canada was laid down in recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, and legislated on in the form of the Official Languages Act of 1969. This Act made no reference to Aboriginal languages and enshrined English and French as the official languages of Canada. The high (and equal) power and status of English and French were affirmed in the Canadian Constitution by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982). Minority language rights of those speaking the official languages were entrenched, but in spite of intense negotiations, Aboriginal linguistic rights were not articulated in the final version of the Canadian Charter (AFN, 1990). Speakers of non-official languages have received very little attention in the Canadian Charter and effectively have to rely on those sections of the charter which refer to equality rights and recognition of Canada's multicultural heritage (AFN, 1990; Blanc, 1985). Across Canada (excluding Nunavut), speakers of Aboriginal languages have received little official recognition except from the Quebec and NWT legislative assemblies. In the former, they are exempt from language regulations, and in the latter, six Aboriginal

languages have been declared official languages in addition to French and English. Recent efforts towards a national policy designed to boost the status and institutional representation of Aboriginal languages (e.g. Kirkness, 1989) remain to be effectively recognised and supported by the government.

Issues about the representation of Aboriginal languages and cultures in the media took centre stage with the increasing politicization of Aboriginal groups in Canada (Stiles, 1984) and coincided with the advent of satellite technologies. Minore and Hill (1990) argued that unlike most governmental policies concerning the institutional representation of (and control by) Aboriginal peoples, the Northern Native Broadcast Access Program initiated in 1983 has been fairly successful. It has provided federal government funds for the production and broadcast of culturally relevant materials in Aboriginal languages. Moreover Minore and Hill (1990) suggest that by being able to respond to local initiatives it has a good potential for the empowerment of Aboriginal peoples.

Overall, as a consequence of European colonisation, the institutional and status vitality of Aboriginal languages and cultures may be considered to be low but increasing today. It should be reemphasized that the resistance of Aboriginal peoples to colonisation has directly contributed to the ongoing socio-political changes (including negotiations for land claims) which are designed to boost their ethnolinguistic vitality. The media is likely to make an ever-increasing contribution to the vitality ('objective' and 'subjective') of Aboriginal languages and cultures following the current era of revolutionary developments in information technology and communication.

Vitality, language use and proficiency

A number of researchers have argued that the construct of ethnolinguistic vitality should not only serve to describe ethnolinguistic situations but should also have some predictive value for ethnolinguistic attitudes and behaviour (Giles et al., 1977; Husband & Khan, 1982; Johnson, Giles & Bourhis, 1983; Landry & Allard, 1994a). Laboratory studies conducted by Sachdev and Bourhis (1991) have shown that 'objective' changes in group numbers, status and power differentials have predictably independent and interactive effects on patterns of intergroup behaviour and perceptions.

In the field, Bourhis and Sachdev (1984) had reported that the 'objectively' high English-Canadian vitality in Hamilton was reflected in the findings that self-reported use of English was higher than self-reported use of Italian not only by majority English-Canadians, but also by minority Italian Canadian

subjects, across all public and private domains. Recently, Landry and Allard (1994b) who surveyed over 1500 anglophone and francophone students across Canada, obtained impressive empirical data showing that French and English usage across a wide array of social domains increased linearly in relation to the 'objective' vitality of the respective ethnolinguistic groups. In their study 'objective' vitality accounted for over 60% of the variance in patterns of language use (Landry & Allard, 1994b). Given this pattern of results, it would be expected that Aboriginal language use and proficiency would be related to their 'objective' vitality in Canada. Though systematic studies on language use and vitality remain to be conducted, some supportive evidence may be obtained from existing data. At the most simplistic level it might be expected that Aboriginal languages would be used infrequently in public settings given their low overall 'objective' ethnolinguistic vitality in Canada. Accordingly, data from the large scale AFN (1990) survey suggest that Aboriginal languages are used rarely in band offices, community meetings or public communication systems. Furthermore, as argued below, analyses of data from other national surveys may be also be used to explore how the regional and generational variation of vitality relates to patterns of language proficiency and use.

The rapid (last 50-100 years) but relatively recent drop in the ethnolinguistic vitality of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is generally reflected in the patterns of language proficiency across generations. For instance, Barsh (1994) reports that whereas in 1941 English or French was the mother tongue of less than 10 % of Aboriginal peoples, in 1991 the percentage of adults who had never spoken an Aboriginal language had increased rapidly to 55%. As shown in Table 2, relative to adults, children are less likely to be proficient in an Aboriginal language or speak it at home. The 1991 APS figures (Statistics Canada, 1993b) also reveal a generational difference in the manner of Aboriginal language acquisition which is likely to have an impact on language use. Relative to adults (Table 2), children are more likely to have learnt Aboriginal languages at school where their languages are taught mainly as a subject. There is some concern that the formal schooled knowledge about Aboriginal languages resulting from this is replacing the linguistic/communicative competence acquired by direct transmission and the everyday use of languages (Barsh,

Table 2: Aboriginal language proficiency (Statistics Canada, 1993b)

IDENTIFIED as	Total Number	% Speak AL	% Never Spoke AL	% write AL	% AL home use	% Learnt AL at school
Aboriginal Children (5-14)	148,160	21	71	7	21	12
"North American Indian"	107,970	22	69	6	21	11
On Reserve	40,500	44	45	11	43	23
Off Reserve	67,465	9	84	2	8	4
Metis	31,985	5	89	2	5	2
Inuit	9,245	67	29	50	66	53
Aboriginal Adults (15+)	388,900	36	55	9	33	6
"North American Indian"	288,365	38	52	8	35	5
On Reserve	102,075	65	28	13	63	10
Off Reserve	186,295	23	65	4	19	2
Metis	84,155	18	74	2	15	1
Inuit	20,805	75	22	60	75	32

1994).

Jarvis and Heaton (1989) statistically assessed the impact of several demographic and geographical factors on patterns of language shift from mother tongue to principal language used in the home from the 1981 Census of Canada. They reported that approximately one in three Aboriginal peoples had an Aboriginal mother tongue and that over 70% of these still used it as the principal language in the home. This figure has increased according to the 1991 APS data (Statistics Canada, 1993b) which suggested that over 90% of those who report proficiency in an Aboriginal language speak it at home.

According to the analyses of Jarvis and Heaton (1989), the majority of the shift in the home from the Aboriginal language was to English. This accords with the high 'objective' vitality of English in Canada. Gender appeared to make little difference in language shift, but location, age and ethnic origin explained significantly larger amounts of variance. As might be expected from a vitality analysis, the greatest language shifts were reported amongst those who lived in the southern and urban parts of Canada, by young and middle-aged adults, and amongst those who reported either Metis origins or were not 'Registered Indians'. Children, older adults, the Inuit and those living in northern Canada displayed the lowest levels of language shift. Analyses of Provincial differences revealed levels of language shift that were the highest in British Columbia, Yukon, Newfoundland and New Brunswick; lowest in the Northwest Territories, Quebec and Nova Scotia; and moderate in the others (Jarvis & Heaton, 1989). Such demographic and regional differences in language shift map reasonably well on to the 'objective' vitality analyses reported above. At the very least, it is clear that vitality factors need to be considered to understand observed patterns of language shift and survival (Giles, Leets & Coupland, 1990).

The original formulations focused on an 'objective' analysis of ethnolinguistic vitality. Data were collected from a variety of sociological, economic, demographic and historical sources. Vitality analyses of this 'objective' type tend to be largely descriptive, allowing some analytic comparison and contrasting of ethnolinguistic groups (Giles, 1978, Bourhis, 1979). In an extension of the original formulations, Bourhis, Giles and Rosenthal (1981) argued that *perceptions* of vitality can play a mediating role in accounting for group members' intergroup strategies, language attitudes, behaviours and degrees of group identification. It was argued that group

members' subjective assessment of ingroup and outgroup vitality may be as important in determining sociolinguistic and interethnic behaviour as the group's 'objective' vitality.

Group members who perceive their own group vitality to be acceptably high on demography items but disproportionately low on institutional support factors may be motivated collectively to improve their own group representation and control of key institutional sectors such as the education system, the economy and the mass media (e.g. the Quebec case, Bourhis, 1984). The fruits of such efforts may have concrete beneficial effects for the 'objective' vitality of the group in institutional settings and may lead to further changes in vitality perceptions. A combination of both subjective and 'objective' vitality information was thus proposed as a more sensitive method of predicting the ethnolinguistic behaviour of group members than simply relying on 'objective' assessments of vitality (Johnson et al., 1983; Sachdev & Bourhis, 1993).

Vitality analyses presented thus far in this paper have focused on Aboriginal languages as a collective whole and ignored their diversity. The differential survival of different Aboriginal languages has been an important area of concern (AFN, 1990; Edwards, 1994). The AFN (1990) argued that pessimistic predictions of language survival which relied on sheer numbers of speakers (e.g. Foster, 1982) were not meaningful and did not serve language planning efforts well. Instead it was argued that the best guiding principles of language planning efforts were the equality of languages and the needs of local communities and groups. Whereas Foster's sheer demography based analysis had only identified 3 Aboriginal languages as having an excellent chance of survival, the AFN analyses predicted 49 language communities as having 'flourishing or enduring' languages. 'Flourishing' and 'enduring' languages were defined as being spoken fluently by more than 60% of all age groups in the local community and accounted for about 65% of speakers of all Aboriginal languages in the AFN (1990) survey. Interestingly, this community based definition appears heavily weighted by demographic (especially sheer numbers) considerations. The use of an ethnolinguistic vitality analyses with the local communities as units of focus may prove more predictive and useful for language planning as it broadens analysis of the

sociostructural context from demography to include issues of status and institutional support/control.

The priority given to language issues in this paper may seem high given the serious economic, social, political and environmental struggles faced by Aboriginal peoples (see Barsh, 1994; also other papers in this issue). However, this focus on language needs to be considered in the broader context of empowerment in Aboriginal education in Canada. Critical theorists (e.g. Cummins, 1986) evaluating research data gathered in a variety of non-Aboriginal settings have argued that the educational failure of minority students can be explained by the degree to which schools reflect or counteract the power relations that exist in the broader society. Specifically, empowering students by promoting and valorising their linguistic and cultural talents (e.g. Hamers & Blanc, 1989), actively encouraging community participation in student development and moving away from the dominant "transmission-oriented" teaching model, will lead to significantly better educational progress. Clearly, societal empowerment of Aboriginal Peoples is urgently necessary, and it is proposed that this should be accompanied by an explicit constitutional recognition of their **linguistic rights**. This would legally necessitate adequate government resourcing, and allow immense educational and social benefits to be reaped as well as revitalising Aboriginal languages and cultures.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sarah Lawson-Sako, Hui-Fen Yang and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions on this paper.

References

- Assembly of First Nations (1990) *Towards Linguistic Justice for First Nations*, AFN Education Secretariat: Ottawa.
- Barsh, R.L. (1994) Canada's Aboriginal Peoples: social integration or disintegration?, *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 14, 1-46.
- Brandt, E. & Ayoungman, V. (1989) Language renewal and language maintenance: a practical guide, *The Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 16, 42-65.
- Blanc, H. (1968) The Israeli Koine as an emergent National Standard, in J.

- Fishman, C. Ferguson, J. Das Gupta (eds.) *Language Problems of Developing Nations*, New York: Wiley.
- Blanc, M (1985) Canada's non official languages: Assimilation or Pluralism, *The London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 3, 46-56.
- Bourhis, R.Y. (1979) Language in ethnic interaction: a social psychological approach. In H. Giles & B. Saint-Jacques (Eds.), *Language and Ethnic Relations* (p. 117-142). Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Bourhis, R.Y. (ed., 1984) *Conflict and language planning in Quebec*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Bourhis, R. Y. (1984b) Introduction: Language policies in multilingual settings, In R.Y. Bourhis (ed., 1984). *Conflict and language planning in Quebec*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Bourhis, R. Y., Giles, H. & Rosenthal, D. (1981). Notes on the construction of a 'Subjective Vitality Questionnaire' for ethnolinguistic groups, - *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 2, 144-55.
- Bourhis, R. Y. & Sachdev, I. (1984). Vitality perceptions and language attitudes: some Canadian data, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 3, 97-126.
- Cummins, J. (1986) Empowering minority students, *Harvard Educational Review*, 56, 18-36.
- Denevan, W.M. (ed., 1976) *The Native Population of the Americas in 1492*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Edwards, J. (1985) *Language, Society and Identity*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Edwards, J. (1994) *Multilingualism*, London: Routledge.
- Fishman, J. (1989) *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic perspective*, Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Foster, M.K. (1982) Canada's indigenous languages: present and future, *Language and Society*, 7, 7-16.
- Gardner, E. & Jimmie, M. (1989) Recognition and legitimization of First Nations languages: B.C. challenge, *The Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 16, 3-24.
- Giles, H. (Ed) (1977). *Language, ethnicity, and intergroup relations*. London: Academic Press.

- Giles, H., Bourhis, R. Y. & Taylor, D. (1977) Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations* (p. 307-348). London: Academic Press.
- Giles, H. & Coupland, N (1991) *Language: Contexts and Consequences*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press.
- Giles, H. & Johnson, P. (1981) The role of language in ethnic group relations. In J. C. Turner and H. Giles (Eds.), *Intergroup Behaviour* (p. 199-243), Oxford: Blackwell.
- Giles, H., Leets, L. & Coupland, N. (1990). Minority language group status: a theoretical conspexus, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 11, 37-56.
- Giles, H., Scherer, K. & Taylor, D. (1979). Speech markers in social interaction. In K. Scherer & H. Giles (Eds.) *Social Markers in Speech*, (p. 343-381). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Giles, H, Taylor, D & Bourhis, R. (1973) Dimensions of Welsh identity, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 7, 29-39.
- Gudykunst, W. & Schmidt, K. (1987) Language and Ethnic Identity: Overview and prologue, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 6.
- Hamers, J.H & Blanc, M.H. (1989). *Bilinguality and Bilingualism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harwood, J., Giles, H. & Bourhis, R.Y. (in press). The genesis of vitality theory: historical patterns and discorsal dimensions, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 108, 167-206.
- Hebert, Y. (1984) The sociopolitical context of Native Indian language education in British Columbia, *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 4, 121-137.
- Husband, C. & Saifullah Khan, V. (1982) The viability of ethnolinguistic vitality: some creative doubts, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 3, 193-205.
- Jarvis, G., & Heaton, T. B. (1989) Language shift among those of Aboriginal mother tongue in Canada, *Canadian Studies in Population*, 16, 25-42.
- Johnson, P., Giles, H. & Bourhis, R. Y. (1983) The viability of ethnolinguistic vitality: a reply. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 4, 255-69.
- Kaegi, G. (1972). The comprehensive view of Indian education. Toronto:

- Indian-Eskimo Association of Canada.
- Kirkness, V. (1989) Aboriginal Languages Foundation: a mechanism for language renewal, *The Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 16, 25-41.
- Landry, R. & Allard, R. (1994a). Ethnolinguistic vitality: a viable construct?, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 108, 5-13.
- Landry, R. & Allard, R. (1994b) Diglossia, ethnolinguistic vitality and language behaviour, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 108, 15-42.
- Liebkind, K. (1982) The Swedish-speaking Finns: A case study in ethnolinguistic identity, in H. Tajfel (Ed) *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations* (p. 367-421), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Minore, J. B. & Hill, M. E. (1990) Native Language Broadcasting: an experiment in empowerment, *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 10, 97-119.
- National Indian Brotherhood (1972) *Indian Control of Indian Education*. Ottawa: National Indian Brotherhood.
- Phillipson, R. (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Perley, D. G. (1993) Aboriginal education in Canada as internal colonialism, *The Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 20, 118-128.
- Ros, M., Cano, I., & Huici, C. (1987) Language and intergroup perception in Spain, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 6, 243-259.
- Ross, J. (1979) Language and the mobilization of ethnic identity, in In H. Giles & B. Saint-Jacques (Eds.), *Language and Ethnic Relations* (p. 1-14), Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Sachdev, I., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1990). Language and Social Identification. In D. Abrams and M. Hogg (eds.) *Social Identity Theory: Constructive and critical advances* (p. 101-124), Harvester-Wheatsheaf.
- Sachdev, I. & Bourhis, R. Y. (1991) Power and status differentials in minority and majority group relations, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 21, 1-24.
- Sachdev, I. & Bourhis, R. Y. (1993). Ethnolinguistic vitality and social

- identity. In D.Abrams & M. Hogg (eds.) *Group motivation: social psychological perspectives* (pp. 33-51), Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Spolsky, B. (1989) Maori bilingual education and language revitalisation, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 10, 89-104.
- Statistics Canada (1993a) *Ethnic Origin: The Nation*, Catalogue 93-315. Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, Science and Technology.
- Statistics Canada (1993b). *Language, Tradition, Lifestyle and Social Issues; 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey*, Catalogue 89-533. Ottawa: Ministry of Industry, Science and Technology.
- Stevenson, W., (1995). Post-colonial reflections on the past and future paths of Canadian Aboriginal women (or, out from under the skirts of Her Majesty), *London Journal of Canadian Studies*, 11, 1-27.
- Stiles, J. (1984) *Communications and Information technologies and the education of Canada's Native Peoples*. Paper No. 6. New Technologies in Canadian Education. Paris: Canadian Commission for UNESCO.
- Taylor, D, Bassili, J, & Aboud, F. (1973) Dimensions of ethnic identity in Canada, *Journal of Social Psychology*, 89, 185-192.
- Taylor, D., Wright, S., Ruggiero, K. & Aitchison, M. (1993) Language perceptions among the Inuit of Arctic Quebec: the future role of the heritage language, *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 195-206.
- Wright, R. E. (1993) Using Census data to examine Aboriginal issues: a methodological note, *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 13, 291-307.

FIRST NATIONS LITERATURE IN CANADA AND THE VOICE OF SURVIVAL

Hartmut Lutz,
Ernst-Moritz-Arndt Universität Greifswald
Greifswald, Germany

Introduction

If we are to decolonize our own minds, we have to start to listen to Native people first, and to read what they write about their own literature. The imperialist inability to listen to First Nations' pedagogy is notorious. Reputedly, after the Battle of the Little Bighorn River (1876), it led Lakota Women to perform a post mortem operation on the body of General Armstrong Custer: they pierced his ears. He had not listened to their warnings after he and his troops had massacred Sioux and Cheyenne elders, women, children, and even ponies, at the Washita River in 1868. A century later, in 1969, things must still have been the same. The Lakota scholar Vine Deloria jr. addressed dominant society's deafness when he published his book *We Talk, You Listen*. But when we listen, --and I know this from my own experience-- we will grow less and less inclined to do the talking, since First Nations orators then and now, and First Nations scholars and critics today, can do it so much better. Of this, I would like to give evidence in my paper. My own involvement in interpreting First Nations Literature is truly and deliberately very marginal¹.

Let me begin with two quotations which have made me think and question for several years now. The first one is from Barbara Christian's essay "The Race for Theory", as published in 1990 in Gloria Anzaldúa's anthology of writings by Women of Color, *Making Face, Making Soul / HACIENDO CARAS*. It expresses the Caribbean writer's and critic's indignation at the eurocentrism of critical theory, and her disappointment with the fact that literary criticism today seems to be moving further away from literary texts, authors and contexts and seems to be growing increasingly self-referential: "Critics are no longer concerned with literature, but with other critics' texts, for the critic yearning for attention has displaced the writer and has conceived of himself as the center" (Christian in Anzaldúa, 335). And she continues later:

For I feel that the new emphasis on literary critical theory is as hegemonic as the world which it attacks. I see the language it creates as one which mystifies rather than clarifies our condition, making it possible for a few people who know that particular

language to control the critical scene -- that language surfaced, interestingly enough, just when the literature of people of color, of black women, of Latin Americans, of Africans began to move to "the center." (Christian 338)

The second quote is from an interview in 1989 with Maria Campbell. In that interview the Métis author, editor, filmmaker, scholar, activist and teacher related how she experienced a writer's block when she found herself unable to adequately express her thoughts in written English. So she consulted an elder, her mentor, who explained to her:

"It's really simple," he said, "why you have trouble with the English language, it's because the language has no Mother. This language lost its Mother a long time ago, and what you have to do is, put the Mother back in the language!"

And then I went away, and I thought, "Now how am I going to put the Mother back in the language?" Because in our language, and in our culture, as well as Indian people's culture, Mother is the land.

So I tried, but what I ended up sounding like was an evangelist minister. Talking about the Mother, the Mother, constantly. So that still didn't do it. (Campbell 1991, 49)

Today, Maria Campbell's autobiography *Halfbreed* is understood by many First Nations and Métis authors to mark the beginning of contemporary Native Literature in Canada. Anishnabe writer Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, and the Delaware poet and playwright Daniel David Moses even called her "the mother of us all." However, it took another twenty years since its publication in 1973 for *Halfbreed* to fully enter the "Canadian canon", as the following brief overview may show.

Historical Overview

"Literature" as written down in English, or French, or any Native language, is a fairly new mode of expression for First Nations people. Native oral traditions are culture-specific, often exploding or transcending Western linear notions of time, place and causality. Encompassing both the sacred and the profane, the oral traditions are understood to lie at the heart of the cultural identity of Canada's Aboriginal nations and to entail the means of survival. It is a very vulnerable identity, however, because as Anishnabe scholar Basil Johnston said, the oral tradition is "only one generation removed from extinction." Banning the use of Native languages in residential schools, separating children from their parents, destroying Native traditions through

missionary imperialism, economically uprooting Native communities and forcefully removing many from their ancestral territories, - these are strategies which have caused irreparable losses in lives and lifestyles to most Native cultures and thus have destroyed much of the oral traditions. But First Nations people fought hard to preserve as much as they could, often by taking underground their rituals and ceremonies, or by hiding children from school agents. So, despite the onslaught, much has survived, and today First Nations people are the inheritors of a vibrant tradition from which many First Nations writers draw.

Penny Petrone in her anthologies *First People, First Voices* (1983) and *Northern Voices* (1988) as well as in her literary history of *Native Literature in Canada* (1990) has documented the existence of a tradition of Native writing going back for centuries. However, apart from Emily Pauline Johnson's publications in the early 20th century, Native texts had little or no impact on Canadian letters. This did not even change in 1960, when Canadian Natives were made citizens of Canada and received the right to vote. Even then, texts stemming from the oral tradition appeared in colonialist collections as "quaint" or "exotic", fit for children or ethnological inquiry, but not to be taken seriously by literary scholarship: The 1965 edition of Klinck's *Literary History of Canada*, vol. III, for example, includes just a very few Native texts under "Children's Literature."

The Métis historian Howard Adams explained retrospectively in an interview in 1990, that the Sixties were "bread and butter years... and ... you cannot talk literature when you are hungry," In 1967 George Clutesi published *Son of Raven, Son of Deer: Fables of the Tse-Shaht People*, and two years later his celebrated *Potlatch* came out. The first is a collection of tales from the oral tradition of his Nootka nation, the second book gives an "eyewitness-account" of the elaborate ceremony that lies at the heart of West Coast Native cultures. Together with Harold Cardinal's *The Unjust Society*, also in 1969, Clutesi's books mark the beginning of a change.

The Seventies saw the publication of Maria Campbell's autobiography *Halfbreed* (1973), mentioned earlier as the first "classic" in Native Literature in Canada. Howard Adams' *Prison of Grass* (1975; new 1989), Lee Maracle's *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1975; new 1990), Minnie Aodla Freeman's *Life Among the Qallunaat* (1978) and others followed the tradition begun by Campbell. Today, these autobiographies are understood to mark the beginning of contemporary First Nations Literature in Canada, while as late as 1983 they were dismissed as "protest literature" (*Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature*, 1983).

Since then, the condescending attitude has changed or is changing. This change is due partly, I am convinced, to the consciousness-raising effect

of the summer of 1990, when Elijah Harper's lonely stand in the Manitoba Assembly brought Meech Lake down and the Mohawk struggle at Oka led to nationwide acts of solidarity which demonstrated the strength and stamina of the First Nations of Canada. More importantly, the lasting change is due to the quality and proliferation of Native texts on the market, many of them published by Native owned and operated publishing houses. There is an ever growing number of internationally successful First Nations playwrights and there are several equally successful Native novelists. Life-stories continue to be published, both as autobiographies and 'as-told-tos', in English, French or Native languages, in syllabics and/or in the roman alphabet. The same can be said about books containing parts of oral traditions. The number of volumes, chapbooks and collections of poetry by Native authors has exploded in recent years, and today there are several textbook-anthologies of First Nations Literature in Canada. As with other "post"-colonial or rather de-colonizing literatures, a proliferation of literary texts ultimately paves the way for the development of new art forms and modes of expression, or, as Northrop Frye put it with regards to "CanLit" since the Sixties [in his famous "Conclusion" to the second edition of Klinck's *Literary History of Canada*, vol. III (1976)]: "Such a quantitative increase eventually makes for a qualitative change:..."(318).

The year 1993 in Canada saw the publication of several books which to me seem to mark the arrival of First Nations Literature on the threshold to international postcolonial writing and academic literary theorizing on the one hand, and an increasingly de-colonized self-determination of "traditionalist" First Nations authors as their own critics. The texts I have in mind are Lee Maracle's second novel *Ravensong*, Thomas King's second novel *Green Grass, Running Water*, Julia V. Emberley's doctoral thesis *Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory*, and an anthology of First Nations analyses of their own literature entitled *Looking at the Words of our People*, edited by Jeannette Armstrong, the Okanagan poet, novelist, critic and teacher.

New Novels

Just like the most successful Native authors in the USA, his country of origin, Tom King is a university professor of literature. His 1993 novel *Green Grass, Running Water* is a postmodern text, full of humour and irony, rich in intertextual references and literary sophistication, drawing both on Western classical traditions of literature and on Native history and storytelling. As in his first novel and many of his short stories, Tom King introduces his readers

to a fictionalized contemporary Albertan Blackfoot setting. He creates an abundance of First Nations and a few non-Native characters, some realist, some literary and historical, and some from a level of existence outside Western everyday experiences but "stock characters" in much of First Nations literature, such as Old Coyote, the Trickster. Some intertextual resonances are subtle and oblique, others are blunt, direct and often hilariously funny. As in other postmodern texts, they present a challenge to the reader's literary knowledge and may easily trigger off an investigative deconstructionist search for referents and signifiers tying the novel to other literary and critical texts. To name four Native elders who are past a hundred years of age and who (time-)travel through the plot to set the world right, "Robinson Crusoe", "Hawkeye", "Ishmael", and "Lone Ranger", is both delightfully entertaining, and pertinent. Serving as ironic guises, the names simultaneously mark the absence of those faithful "friends of the whiteman" or literary "apple-Indians", whose white masters' names are alienated, as they deconstruct the imperial gaze. To have Henry Dawes, Mary Rowlandson, Elaine Goodale, Hannah Dustan and John Collier sit together as children in a class taught by a Native teacher named Alberta, likewise, is funny, ironic and rife with literary and historical resonances. The book is full of sparks and flashes, and whoever can decode their significance may feel "in with the author".

Clearly, this novel, like works by the very successful Anishnabe professor and writer, Gerald Vizenor, who is a friend of King's and who, he said, influenced him, is addressed to a highly specialized readership of literary scholars and postmodern enthusiasts, "writing back", perhaps, more than writing "home." However, a statement like the following would probably delight both non-Native and Native audiences alike: "We would have gotten here sooner," said the Lone Ranger, "but Coyote knew a short cut." (318) No wonder, that literary critics and scholars welcomed and reviewed the novel quite positively, and Tom King may well become known as **the** Canadian expert on Native literature and **the** Native novelist in Canada, a tokenization, I am sure, he would not be happy with. *Green Grass, Running Waters* has firmly established contemporary Native Literature in Canada as a field open to and even inviting Western academic study and theorizing. It marks one direction in which parts of First Nations Literature in Canada may go, and in which texts by Native authors from the U.S. have already gone, i.e. a growing affinity with literary developments in the mainstream, and an overcoming of ethnic and cultural classifications which some First Nations authors - like artists - may see as confining and stifling. They won't be put in a niche or become ossified by what a mainstream readership may accept as "Indian", but would rather be read as modern authors of World Literature in one of the "englishes", regardless of their background. This may also entail a

depoliticization of their works, which no longer take an active part in the struggle for internal decolonization.

By contrast, Lee Maracle's novel *Ravensong* is overtly political and takes a strong anti-colonialist and sometimes openly anti-white stand. Set in a small Native community in B.C., which is separated from a small middle-class-white town by a creek and a highly symbolic bridge, the story centres around Stacey's last summer at home before leaving for UBC. The story addresses conditions pertinent to First Nations and other peoples of color in North America. Issues of class hegemony and exploitation, sex and sexual orientation, and racism or ethnocentrism are addressed in a tone which may best be understood in terms of Alice Walker's definition of "Womanism." The story unfolds against a backdrop of a flu epidemic, a drought and first cases of internal violence and sexual abuse within the Native community in 1953, foreshadowing the nightmare reality many Native communities are faced with today. Stacey courageously combats the racism she is exposed to as the only Native student in the white high school without realizing the amount of prejudice against white people she tolerates within herself and her surrounding,- and there are few passages within the novel to tell readers that the author does not share Stacey's prejudice. Leaving aside some flaws in style and structure which earlier reviewers have pointed out in the novel², my present reading highlights thematic and formal features which seem to set it off as First Nations Literature from developments in main-stream North American novels, beyond postmodernism or magic realism.

The novel presents a reality which is much wider than that which Western notions of what is real encompass. Unlike King's postmodern almost playful though deliberate experimenting with different sets of reality and times, interwoven by Native storytelling and ethnocultural references, there is no indication in *Ravensong* that the expanded scope of reality is a literary function. Rather, the novel's tone is staunchly realist - though not always "real" - throughout. But this novel's reality includes Cedar as a compassionate nourishing agent who "wept in time with the rain" (14, 44) and whose words and feelings are understood by Celia, Stacey's younger sister. And there is Raven, the Trickster-Creator, as a female entity speaking to Cedar and trying several times unsuccessfully to talk to Stacey as a cawing crow. Raven literally "plots" in this novel the execution of a larger design for the community in which Stacey becomes an agent. There are several First Nations characters in the novel besides Celia, who see scenes from the past as vividly as they observe the present. No explanations are given for such moments of vision, and the capacity to "see" beyond material reality is treated as matter of factly as the canning of berry preserves,- this is a feature the novel has in

common with other Native texts from Canada, e.g. Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*. *Ravensong* also shares with Armstrong's *Slash* a certain reservation against what we might call "psychological realism." The otherwise omniscient narrative voice is reticent to pry into the character's psyche, and there is no stream-of-consciousness technique. Layers of **mythic** "time immemorial" merge with scenes from the community's **historical** past and the narrated time in the **present**, i.e. in the year 1953 and the time of the epilogue set "some twenty-five years later" (197). [In Maracle's first novel, *Sundogs*, there is not even a division of chapters, emphasizing the cyclical continuum of ("Indian") time.] The novel seems to seek to continue a project on which several First Nations authors are embarked: to find a way for adequately putting onto paper in English a First Nations tribal or pan-Indian reality without interpreting or mediating it for the non-Native audience. There is an ongoing struggle to regain the Native Voice in a language which "lost the Mother", lost its ties to the land, which entails a whole way of life, an entire culture, philosophy and religious practice, as well as being the language in which mothers teach their young. Through (e/im)migrations that started in Jylland, Anglia and Saxony around 450 or earlier, English in Canada is disconnected from the histories rooted in a land this side of the Atlantic. As such, Lee Maracle's novels document a determination to write "home", following a design which the 1992 "Returning the Gift"-First Nations Writers Festival in Oklahoma highlighted (Bruchac; Birchfield).

Both novels published in 1993, Tom King's *Green Grass, Running Water* and Lee Maracle's *Ravensong* mark divergent positions within the **continuum** of First Nations Literature,- a postmodern one, heading First Nations texts towards a stylistic merger with mainstream literature while retaining some Native contents,- and a more "cultural nationalist" or "traditional" one, seeking to develop a voice in English to express First Nations' reality and philosophy in a style which is still being developed to meet the needs of literary self-determination. Both tendencies are part of a coherent project of First Nations Literature in Canada asserting itself as part of or apart from Canadian Letters. Critical texts by Native and non-Native authors dealing with contemporary First Nations literature reflect this development.

Criticisms and Scholarship

Julia Emberley's doctoral dissertation *Thresholds of Difference*, is subtitled *Feminist Critique, Native Women's Writings, Postcolonial Theory*. It is an attempt to develop a critical theory of First Nations women's Literature based on a few selected works by four First Nations women writers in relation to

deconstructionist feminist and Marxist approaches. The theoretical section of the book comprises more than two thirds of the entire study, dealing with an impressive volume of postmodern theory from Said's studies of Orientalism and various approaches to a feminism of decolonization as opposed to what the author calls "bourgeois imperialist feminism." In the last section, it also touches on established texts by First Nations women authors: Armstrong, Campbell, Culleton, and Freeman. I am impressed with and somewhat awed and even confused by the theoretical sophistication of Julia Emberley's study and the language she uses. Surely, this book will serve as an opener for deconstructivist literary scholars to enter a discourse about and an approach to First Nations Literature over a threshold smoothed by Emberley with academic theories they are familiar with. Emberley is to be recommended for her insistence on a politics of decolonization informed by Marxist theories on class, as well as feminist theories and concepts of Third and Fourth World writing. She is to be lauded for the respect she articulates for First Nations cultures and the carefulness with which she painstakingly tries to avoid eurocentrism. Surely, hers is the most carefully phrased and theoretically most sophisticated study of texts by Canadian Native authors so far. And yet, even Emberley cannot always avoid the old colonialist language, both in the level of her theoretical abstractedness and in her occasional use of non-neutral terms, e.g. when she postulates specific gender relations within "gatherer/hunter" societies, thus excluding agri- and horticulturalists and evoking as a subtext the hierarchical and (r)evolutionary positioning of the "development" of societies along the traditionally eurocentric scale underlying Marx' and Engels' theories. A term like "pastoral" (135) when applied to a text like Armstrong's *Slash* would also need further clarification to avoid a eurocentric bias. So, despite my great admiration for the theoretical sophistication of Emberley's text and my empathy for the caution and respect with which she approaches Native women's literature, there are strong indications that her study would still come under the criticism entailed in the first quote, where Barbara Christian said that literary theorists talk about and to other theorists in a language that is exclusionary and thus academically hegemonic, getting further and further removed from the primary texts and their producers. At the same time, the book confirms the initial thesis that Native writing in Canada has now reached the threshold to postmodernism, both in primary texts and in theoretical approaches.

The year 1993 also saw the publication of the first anthology of Native "self-criticism" of First Nations Literature in Canada (and the U.S.A.). Jeannette Armstrong's *Looking at the Words of Our People*, as criticism from within Native cultures, is a unique document of self-determination in research,

criticism, editing and publishing, that is characteristic of the work of the En'Owkin School of International First Nations Writing, of which she is the founding director. Containing 13 different articles besides the editor's introduction, written by eleven First Nations authors/critics from both Canada and the U.S.A., the anthology contains both topical discussions, e.g. on Native publishing (Greg Young-Ing) and the 1992 "Returning the Gift"-Festival in Oklahoma (D.L. Birchfield) or on general aspects of First Nations Literature and Culture, as well as a comparative approach to *Halfbreed* and *In Search of April Raintree* (Kateri Damm), or interpretations of individual novels like Tom King's *Medicine River* (Gerry William), Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* (Janice Acoose), Janet Campbell Hale's *The Jailing of Cecilia Capture* (Victoria Lena Manyarrows), and Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (Armand Garnet Ruffo).

In her one-and-a-half page "Editor's Note", based on her previous experiences with audiences she had to address on First Nations writing, Jeannette Armstrong explains the entire project to Native and non-Native readers alike. In a very condensed and direct form she addresses the issues central to her teaching and our reading of First Nations Literature. She stresses that "First Nations cultures,..., have unique sensibilities which shape the voices coming forward into written English Literature" (7)." She expresses her concern with the prevalent reading of First Nations Literature and its pedagogy. She insists, that the critical pedagogical voice questioning First Nations Literature should come from a reading, and sense-making, from within the culture from which the literature arises. The culture specificity of the Native voices from various backgrounds -- urban-modern, pan-Indian or tribal specific -- suggest that

First Nations Literature will be defined by First Nations Writers, readers, academics and critics and perhaps only by writers and critics from within those varieties of First Nations contemporary practise and past practise of culture and the knowledge of it. (7)

And she continues that

in reading First Nations Literature the questioning must first be an acknowledgement and recognition that the voices are culture-specific voices and that there are **experts** (my emphasis) within those cultures who are essential to be drawn from and drawn out in order to incorporate into the reinterpretation through pedagogy, the context of English Literature coming from Native Americans. (7)

Armstrong's cultural nationalist approach and her repeated insistence on the

pedagogy, the didactic power of First Nations Voice, is part of a strategy of decolonization. She insists that the instructional impetus of such practice is a necessary part of an emancipatory process.

First Nations literature, as a facet of cultural practice, contains symbolic significance and relevance that is an integral part of the deconstruction-construction of colonialism and the reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practice.(8)

A reading of the individual contributions to the volume shows recurrent themes and concerns within the Native discourse on First Nations literature. Clearly, besides tribal culture-specificity, all contemporary First Nations texts reflect centuries of colonization. "...being Indian in this time is political" (89) writes A.A. Hedge Coke, a Huron from Quebec, in her discussion of First Nations poetry. Others address issues like Indian stereotyping (Acoose 36ff., Dumont 47) and the lasting effects of what Kateri Damm calls the "colonialist image making machine" (45). Several authors, especially Janice Acoose and Kateri Damm embark on projects of revising literary and national Canadian history, in a process which the latter aptly calls an "alterNative perspective of the history of Canada" (95). The struggle for a decolonization of the literary canon, for an opening to texts and concepts by First Nations writers (Niatum 65), leads to questions of hegemony, power and alterity.

As in the writings by other Writers of Color, especially Third and Fourth World Women writers (Kateri Damm specifically mentions Maori women, 18), the liminality of most First Nations authors as individuals of mixed descent is addressed repeatedly (Damm 18, Blaeser 56, Niatum 76). The contributions bear witness to the fact that "halfbreeds", Métis, mestizas, dwellers of the borderlands of culture, race, territory and sexuality worldwide are braiding transcultural networks and developing perspectives that implode the former imperialist frontiers of exclusion and alterity and approach global views which make a strength out of marginalization, turning the sensitized rawness of suffering and hurt into highly sensitive and sensible sources for developing thoughts and envisioning actions to ensure survival beyond the Western linear progress towards death. This concern for survival, for the "continuity among generations" (Niatum 68) is a recurrent theme in much of Native writing and criticism (Damm 23), (it is also a foregrounded topic in *Ravensong*), be it with regards to the land as source and home (Niatum 71, Acoose 139) or the continuity of dreaming.

When you are forced to survive socially, economically and spiritually, completely at the mercy of a dominant predatory culture that still does all to break down further your sources of power, you would be a fool not to continue the tradition of dreaming a path of transformation beyond the paradox of your physical prison,"(79) writes Duane Niatum.

Of all approaches to First Nations Literature in this anthology, Kimberly Blaeser's essay "Native Literature: Seeking a Critical Center" (51-62), is perhaps the most "sophisticated" in terms of postmodern theorizing. A former doctoral student of Gerald Vizenor's, Blaeser embarks on a dialogue between Native and non-Native scholars who have "employed, for example, postmodern theory, the critical language of the likes of Mikhael Bakhtin, Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida in the reading of Native American texts" (55) with the

search for a way to approach Native Literature from an indigenous cultural context, a way to frame and enact a tribal-centered criticism. It seeks a critical voice and method which moves from the culturally-centered text outward toward the frontier of 'Border' studies, rather than an external critical voice and method which seeks to penetrate, appropriate, colonize or conquer the cultural center, and thereby, change the stories or remake the literary meaning.(53)

In her dialogue she stresses that while she "believes" postmodern theories, her former "approaches of applying already established theory to native writing" implicate her own works as those "of most other scholars of native literature."(56) Instead, like the editor of the anthology, Blaeser argues that to protect and safeguard the integrity of Native American story, a critical voice has to be asserted "that comes from within that tribal story itself" (61). Here, I think, all contributors to the anthology seem to concur, not just theoretically but by their practical involvement as writers, teachers and critics. The volume is a first step towards realizing an approach Lee Maracle postulated in an interview in 1991 as "theory coming through story" (Maracle 1991, 171f.).

Clearly, in their assessment of First Nations Literary Theory/Story, the contributors turn away from literature for literature's sake or texts emancipating themselves from reality. They advocate a literature permeated by a sense of responsibility for a First Nations continuum in space and time, and are keenly aware of social and cultural obligations that are shared by authors and readers alike. Poet and critic Armand Garnet Ruffo, at present an instructor at the En'Owkin Center, specifically addresses even the non-Native readers, insisting that First Nations literature is more than a lifeless page.

LUTZ: FIRST NATIONS LITERATURE & THE VOICE OF SURVIVAL

For the outsider, then, attempting to come to terms with Native people and their literature, the problem is not one to be solved by merely attaining the necessary background, reading all the anthropological data that one can get one's hands on. Rather, for those who are serious, it is more a question of cultural initiation, of involvement and commitment, so that the culture and literature itself becomes more than a museum piece, dusty pages, something lifeless. (174)

The issue of Survival remains central, both as the Voice of the Mother and in a tribal and universal sense. The authors contained in *Looking at the Words of Our People* are from both sides of the U.S./Canadian border. Here we should remember that for Aboriginal peoples the division of the North American continent along the 49th parallel is particularly artificial. From Passamaquoddy Bay to the Straits of Juan de Fuca, for First Nations authors on either side, the U.S.- Canadian border is as (im-)pertinent as the former iron curtain was in Europe for Fins and Russians in Karelia, for Sami people in the USSR, Finland, Sweden and Norway, or for Hungarians and Austrians, or the Germans, on either side. Perceiving Canadian culture as separated entirely from U.S. culture may tend to dissociate the discourse on First Nations literature as a part of or apart from Canadian culture from joint experiences on a shared continent. It would artificially separate First Nations Canadians from Native Americans and make more difficult an approach to first Nations literature as often seeking to encode the surviving Voice of the Mother.

Many people in Europe and elsewhere understand the urgency of that voice when seeing daily the gradual erosion of stone sculptures and the silent slow death of our forests through acid rain, and when witnessing the insidiously invisible but cumulatively accelerating buildup of the nuclear catastrophe around us. For many Europeans the concluding stanzas of Jeannette Armstrong's complex poem "Rocks" carry a very immediate, concrete and vitally pertinent global message, that is delivered in a traditional "tribal" or national Okanagan voice and setting, and that posits, against the threat of global destruction of a tiny grain of uranium which may flower into the blazing white of a nuclear explosion, the traditional practices of meditation, dreams and the vision quest:

as old stone worked churches dissolve ever so minutely
in the sad rain
while in the distance
one tiny grain waits
to flower into blazing white

I study the rocks
 I have set into a circle
 opening to the east
 on this mountaintop

(Armstrong 1991a, 24)

Let me finish with a last quote from *Looking at the Words of Our People*. It is the entire concluding paragraph to Kateri Damm's essay, "Dispelling and Telling: Speaking Native Realities in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed* and Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree*". It expresses in a much more informed and convincing way than I could hope to achieve the importance of First Nations Voice for all of us.

Writing, for Armstrong, for Campbell, for Culleton, for Maracle, for Raintree, for Crosby ... is empowering. It is a means of recognizing and acknowledging the strength, the beauty, the value and the contributions of Native peoples. It is a means of affirming the cultures, of clarifying lies, of speaking truth, of resisting oppression, of asserting identity, of self-empowerment, of survival, of moving beyond survival. As readers, it is our responsibility to join this circle humbly, to listen actively, to accept responsibility, to become more informed, to recognize our complacency, to face our pasts, to remember, to confront the vestiges of imperialist thought which still cling to the edges of our minds, and to create new opportunities for telling and dispelling through our audience. In words, the healing continues.

So, the story goes... (113)

Bibliography

- Adams, Howard. *Prison of Grass: Canada from the Native Point of View* (1975). Rev. ed. Saskatoon, Sask.: Fifth House, 1989.
- "Howard Adams (Interview)." *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations With Canadian Native Authors*. Ed. Hartmut Lutz. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991. 135-154.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria (ed.). *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras. Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Foundation, 1990.
- Armstrong, Jeannette. *Enwhisteetkwa: Walk in Water*. Penticton.: Okanagan Curriculum Project, 1982.
- *Neekna and Chemai*. Penticton: Theytus Books, 1984.
- *Slash*. Penticton: Theytus Books, 1985.

- *Breath Tracks*. Stratford/Vancouver: Williams-Wallace/Theytus, 1991a.
- with Douglas Cardinal. *The Native Creative Process: A Collaborative Discourse, with photographs by Greg Young-Ing*. Penticton: Theytus, 1991b.
- , "Jeannette Armstrong (Interview)." *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations With Canadian Native Authors*. Ed. Hartmut Lutz. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991c.
- , ed. *Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature*. Penticton, B.C.: Theytus Books, 1993.
- Bataille, , Gretchen M. *Native American Women: A Biographical Dictionary*. New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1993.
- Brand, Dionne. "Interview by Dagmar Novak." *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, ed. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990. 271-77.
- Bruchac, Joseph, ed. *Returning the Gift: Poetry and Prose from the First North American Native Writer's Festival*. Tucson and London: University of Arizona Press, 1994.
- Campbell, Maria. *Halfbreed*. Halifax: Formac Publishing, 1973.
- (ed.). *Achimoona*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1985.
- with Linda Griffith. *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation*. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1989.
- , "Maria Campbell (Interview)." *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations With Canadian Native Authors*. Ed. Hartmut Lutz. Saskatoon, Sask.: Fifth House, 1991. 41-65.
- , "Great Divide [Review of Lee Maracle's *Ravensong*]." *Quill and Quire* 51.7 (1993): 46.
- Cardinal, Harold. *The Unjust Society: The Tragedy of Canada's Indians*. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1969.
- , *The Rebirth of Canada's Indians*. Edmonton: Hurtig, 1977.
- Christian, Barbara. "The Race for Theory." *Making Face, Making Soul: Haciendo Caras*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa. San Francisco: Aunt Lute foundation, 1990: 335-345.
- Clutesi, George. *Son of Raven, Son of Deer. Fables of the Tse-shaht People*. Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing, 1967.
- , *Potlatch*. Sidney, B.C.: Gray's Publishing, 1969 (repr. 1973).
- Culleton, Beatrice. *In Search of April Raintree*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1983. 6th repr. 1987.
- , *April Raintree*. Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 1984. 3rd repr. 1987.
- , *Spirit of the White Bison*, ill. by Robert Kakaygeesick, Jr. Winnipeg:

- Pemmican Publications, 1985. repr. 1987.
- Currie, Noel Elizabeth. "Jeannette Armstrong and the Colonial Legacy." *Canadian Literature* nos. 124-25 (Spring/Summer 1990): 138-52.
- Fee, Margery. "Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and Beatrice Culleton's *April Raintree*." *Canadian Literature* nos. 124-25 (Spring/Summer 1990): 160-80.
- Freeman, Minnie Aodla. *Life Among the Qallunaat*. Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1978.
- Hernandez, Inés. "An Open Letter to Chicanas: On the Power and Politics of Origin." in: *Out With-/With-Out Discovery: A Native Response to Columbus*, ed. Ray Gonzalez. Seattle: Broken Moon Press, 1992. 153-166.
- Hum-Ishu-Ma / Mourning Dove. *Cogewea: The Half-Blood* (1927). Lincoln & London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1981.
- Hutcheon, Linda. "Introduction." in: *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*, eds. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990. 1 - 16.
- Joseph, Gloria I. (ed.) *Schwarzer Feminismus: Theorie und Politik afro-amerikanischer Frauen*. Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1993.
- Johnston, Basil. "One Generation from Extinction." *Native Writers and Canadian Writing*, ed. W.H. New. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990; 10-15.
- Karrer, Wolfgang, and Hartmut Lutz. "Minority Literatures in North America: From Cultural Nationalism to Liminality." *Minority Literatures in North America: Contemporary Perspectives*. Eds. W. Karrer and H. Lutz. Frankfurt a.M., Bern, New York, Paris: Peter Lang, 1990. 11-64.
- Keeshig-Tobias, Lenore. "Lenore Keeshig-Tobias (Interview)." *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations With Canadian Native Authors*. Ed. Hartmut Lutz. Saskatoon, Sask.: Fifth House, 1991. 79-88.
- Lutz, Hartmut. Cultural Appropriation as a Process of Displacing Peoples and History." *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 10.2 (1990): 167-182.
- , *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations With Canadian Native Authors*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991.
- , and students, eds./transls. *Four Feathers: Poems and Stories by Canadian Native Authors/ Vier Federn: Gedichte und Geschichten kanadischer Indianer/innen und Métis*. OBEMA, No. 7. Osnabrück: VC-Verlag, 1992.
- , "O Canada!" The National State and International Ecology in Contemporary Native Literature in Canada." *Literary Responses to*

- Arctic Canada*, ed. Jörn Carlsen. Lund: The Nordic Association for Canadian Studies, 1993; 105-113.
- , "Confronting Cultural Imperialism: First Nations People are Combating Continued Cultural Theft." *Multiculturalism in North America and Europe: Social Practices - Literary Visions*, eds. Hans Braun & Wolfgang Klooß. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1995; 132-151.
- , "Contemporary Native Literature in Canada and 'The Voice of the Mother'." *O Canada: Essays on Canadian Literature and Culture*, ed. Jörn Carlsen. Dolphin 25. Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1995; 79-96.
- Maracle, Lee. *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel* (1975). Foreword by Jeannette Armstrong. Toronto: Women's Press, 1990.
- , *I Am Woman*. North Vancouver: Write-on Press Publishers Ltd., 1988.
- , *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1990.
- with Sky Lee, Daphne Marlatt and Betsy Warland (eds.). *Telling It: Women and Language Across Cultures*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1990.
- , "Lee Maracle (Interview)." *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations With Canadian Native Authors*. Ed. Hartmut Lutz. Saskatoon, Sask.: Fifth House, 1991. 169-179.
- , *Sundogs*. Penticton: Theytus, 1992.
- , *Ravensong: A Novel*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993.
- Moraga, Cherríe and Gloria Anzaldúa (eds.). *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New York: Kitchen Table/Women of Color Press, 1981ff.
- Moses, Daniel David. *Delicate Bodies*. Vancouver: Blewointmentpress, 1980; repr.: Sechelt, B.C.: Nightwood Editions, 1992.
- , *The White Line: Poems*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1990.
- , *Coyote City: A Play in Two Acts*. Stratford, Ont.: Willams-Wallace, 1990.
- , "Daniel David Moses (Interview)." *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations With Canadian Native Authors*, Ed. Hartmut Lutz. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991. 155-168.
- , *Almighty Voice and His Wife*. Stratford, Ont.: Willams-Wallace, 1992.
- , and Terry Goldie, eds. *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992.'
- Petrone, Penny. *First People, First Voices*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1983.

- , *Northern Voices: Inuit Writing in English*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1988.
- , *Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present*. Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990.
- Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. London: The Women's Press, 1984.
- Welsh, Christine. "Voices of the Grandmothers: Reclaiming a Metis Heritage." *Canadian Literature* No. 131 (Winter 1991): 15-24.
- Witalec, Janet, ed. *Native North American Literature: Biographical and Critical Information on Native Writers and Orators from the United States and Canada from Historical Times to the Present*. New York et.al.: Gale Research Inc., 1994.

Endnotes

¹I started off in English Literature with a PhD on William Golding (1975) but then moved into Native American Studies "sideways" as one concerned about the racism we teach our children. So I started working on a habilitation thesis about Indian Stereotyping in U.S. culture and in German books for children [*"Indianer und "Native Americans"* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1985)]. That research included a year in California in 1979/80 and brought me into contact with First Nations people, a contact which never broke off again. Meanwhile, I have helped editing and translating First Nations Literature and I have occasionally given historical overviews, but I am still very reluctant to "interpret" First Nations authors' texts.

² Maria Campbell in *Quill and Quire* 59.7 (July 1993): 46 remarked on the "blunt picture of cultural tensions and prejudices" and wrote: "Is it prejudice or a gulf of difference too deep to cross? Stacey asks in her relentless quest for 'the why of this world.' Well, that is the question of these days of mounting cultural tensions. For though she dances around it with subtly inflected and visual language, however, Maracle's blunt approach never really takes us any closer to an answer - or even mutual respect." And Phil Hall in *Books in Canada* 22.6 (Sept. 1993): 44-45, is even more critical of the novel.