Choosing Border Work

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Assuming that research, the creation of knowledge, influences local power and authority and may in fact contribute to changing power relationships between First Nations and non-First Nations peoples and institutions, is it a paradox for a non-Native researcher to enter a social arena—a Native education centre dedicated to Indian control of Indian education—and to profess to contribute to the struggle for control, through research? In a retrospective on just such a research project, Haig-Brown conceptualizes her place in the struggle for Indian control as being on a border that demarcates a wider struggle related to land and to a First Nations definition of people's relationship to land. A subsidiary struggle is for recognition of the legitimacy of First Nations' conceptual ordering of research priorities and of First Nations voice in the articulation of research findings. Haig-Brown reviews the detail of research design, entry into the research "field," the nature of an ethnographer's relationships with the people who provide information, and the choosing of strategies for making generalizations and for reporting the experience. Those discussions are tangential border positions for a triangulated focus on questions about the legitimacy and adequacy of ethnographic research in such a situation.

Every time a white person stands up to talk about Indians, I get knots in my stomach. (Verna Kirkness, Director of the First Nations House of Learning, University of British Columbia)

On the Borders: Indian Control

People who work with First Nations education, Native and non-Native, work in a border world. Here the struggle for land, sovereignty, and self-government pervades. This struggle for control takes place on the borders between nations: the many First Nations whose peoples are indigenous, and Canada, a nation of immigrants and their offspring, the non-Natives. The nations are complex and dynamic. The peoples are immediately and simultaneously diverse and unified in histories and cultures. In British Columbia, where few treaties were ever negotiated and aboriginal title was never extinguished, First Nations and federal and provincial governments struggle in a variety of ways. The fight, generation after generation, has been between groups claiming possession of the same lands. The numbers of casualties rank with those in countless wars over land that have been more openly fought throughout the world. Although the dead and wounded do not always have gunshot wounds, cultural invasions have brought alcoholism, disease, and frightening community disruption. Struggles for control shape and daily reshape the borders of this world.

Control of education, one aspect of this struggle, is central to my recent research. Almost no children are taught the histories of the current struggles or the bases of the persevering battles over aboriginal rights. For years First Nations peoples have been condemning culturally abusive education systems. They seek one built on respect for differences that legitimate their places in these lands, their histories, and their dynamic cultures.

Three categories of people become involved in working for change in these border regions. First Nations people are border workers by the nature of their aboriginal claims and their persisting marginalization by Canadian society; non-Native people visit the border for a variety of reasons; and some non-Native people choose to remain in the border area (Haig-Brown, 1990).

I am one of the non-Native people who visited and chose to stay. A white woman of bourgeois English origins, I worked first by invitation with First Nations adults studying to become teachers. After a maternity break, I chose to return to that work and, when I began doing research, I decided to work with First Nations education and the people involved there. I turned to ethnography, which I found coherent with participation in and description of the tension-filled area in which I worked. Ethnography allows for the negotiation of cross-cultural realities between the sensitive interviewer and the interested co-investigator. While there are clearly limits to the analogy, the behavior of the trained ethnographer, watching and listening in order to learn, replicates the traditional role of learner in many First Nations cultures. Simultaneously, in this border world non-Natives feel the ever-present tension between being useful and being undesirable.

This article focuses on some of the details of conducting my doctoral research in the border world. It documents my constant efforts to acknowledge the oppressive nature of much previous research with First Nations people and to avoid similar pitfalls. I have attempted to conduct research that arises out of respect for the people with whom I have chosen to work and who have allowed me into their world. I hope that the article stirs signs of recognition in those who have engaged in similar research and proves thought-provoking for those who have not done so.

Beginning the Relationship

People doing research engage in a process called gaining access. For me, *gaining access* conjures up a vision of breaking down a gate or coming in with a search warrant. I prefer to think of the start of research in which I participate with other human beings as beginning a relationship. I can begin the work only because other people accept me as a worthwhile confidante. While their acceptance is merely permission to conduct an interview, in many cases there is an implication that this interview holds the possibility for more work together and even for friendship. The underlying hope is that somehow this research may serve to address injustice in First Nations education.

In some way, my eventual acceptance as researcher in the border world began at least two years before I officially started. My initial contact with the Native Education Centre (NEC), an adult education institute in Vancouver, British Columbia, came in the winter of 1986-1987. A program developer from the Centre phoned me to see if I would be interested in developing a curriculum for a science and health careers preparation program for First Nations adult students. I was interested for two reasons. I had heard about the Centre over the years and was curious about it. I also wanted to do some work to encourage First Nations students to enter science and health careers. In the back of my mind was the possibility that the Centre might be a site for doctoral research if I decided not to return to my interior home of Kamloops to conduct research with people with whom I had already developed relationships.

I felt committed to working in a specific context with First Nations people, but only on their initial invitation. Once the people in control have some opportunity to come to know me, I feel less hesitant about asking permission to conduct research. I was eventually hired to prepare the curriculum outline in the summer of 1987 (Haig-Brown, 1987). By this time I had begun to frame my research proposal and had decided to compare two examples of what the people involved could call "Indian controlled" education.

At the same time, I agonized over the suitability of centering my research in First Nations education. I pondered whether doing research for my own benefit could possibly be justified. I read extensively what non-white people, particularly feminists, had to say about white people working around them. Little of it was positive. I considered my 10-year history of direct involvement with First Nations education and my lifetime of passing involvement—but an involvement that was important to me—with First Nations people in a variety of contexts. I could not deny that or pretend it did not exist. I knew the politics. I knew the exploitation of First Nations people in which academics had engaged for generations. And I recalled a few non-Native people who had contributed to First Nations struggles in some important ways. I thought of Freire's (1983, 1985) discussion of the class suicide of those from groups who are not oppressed working at the side of those who are. Were there parallels in the work I wanted to do? Could this work be useful to the people with whom I wanted to continue to be involved?

I became familiar with the literature on action research. Sol Tax (Chambers, 1985) argues that the ethnographer "should operate within the goals and activities initiated by the groups seeking to direct the course of their own development" (p. 22). Perhaps I could do work that would contribute in some way to the struggle of First Nations people to be heard. I thought of Moschkovich's (1981, p. 79) comments that it is not the duty of the oppressed to educate the oppressor and wondered if my work might contribute in some acceptable way to the education of my racist brothers and sisters. I recognized that educational institutions like the Native Education Centre exist in that borderland between First Nations cultures and mainstream employment and higher education. This was the same border world in which I had worked as an employee of the university with First Nations students.

I pondered the ongoing debate about the suitability of non-Native writers writing about First Nations people's experiences. I knew the charges of appropriating First Nations stories and misrepresenting the people. Recent developments in experimental ethnography played an important role in my eventual decision. Through reading and discussion of the current soul-searching going on in the field of ethnography, I came to understand that no individual can adequately represent the experience of any other. An ethnographer, while acknowledging that she can never come to a full understanding of another's experience, must try. This intense work at the university brought some clarity to the work I was doing among people whose social and personal histories diverged so greatly from my own. I came to accept myself as a member of a "border culture" no less significant because I was there by choice.

By the time I had completed the science curriculum outline, I had decided that the NEC would be a good place for my research. About that time, I was invited to sit on a committee called the First Nations Federation of Adult Educators, a group of administrators of First Nations institutions from around the province. The NEC administrator had prompted formation of the group as part of his efforts to encourage cooperation among educators working with First Nations adults. I volunteered to work with two others on a research proposal to the provincial government, and the proposal was successful. It resulted in my participation as researcher retained to prepare an overview of the NEC in the spring of 1988.

At the same time, I approached the advisory committee of the teacher education program with which I had worked to see if I could use their program for comparison with the NEC as an alternative model of First Nations control. That request was denied. The comment conveyed from the committee was that First Nations people should conduct such research. Although I felt hurt at first, I recognized the legitimacy of such feelings. I thought of the Maori women I had heard earlier in the year saying that no research by Pakehas was being approved. The people needed some uninterrupted time away from white people in order to take control of their lives. Refusing to abandon my goal to do something other than add to the already predominant literature on non-Native people, I persisted and turned my focus to the NEC.

Because the administrator was away, the assistant who was taking his place raised the issue at a board meeting. It was tentatively approved. I continued working on a proposal and the ethics committee forms. In late April of 1988, when the administrator returned, he agreed that I could present my proposal to the staff and students.

I prepared a short talk, selected my clothes—not too formal, not too sloppy—and crossed my fingers. I settled myself in the classroom where the staff meeting was to be held. People wandered in slowly, curious about me. "Have you joined the staff?" "Oh, you're a special guest. You have money for us?" I laughed and said, "Guest, not special, but no money. Sorry." Gradually about 30 people filled the room. I was first on the agenda. I knew the staff was tired after a day of teaching and would have little patience with long-winded academic jargon. I began with three reasons I had for choosing this study: a question about where the strength of First Nations participation in the education Centre comes from, and the facts that academics are, for the most part, ignoring First Nations education, and that I liked being a student. I briefly described the kind of research I would do, not statistics, but ethnography, talking to people to come to understanding. I wanted to know about their educational backgrounds, what brought them to the Centre, and most importantly what First Nations control meant to them. As I finished, the administrator

> dropped the bombshell. He said that basically in order to proceed, the staff would have to approve my coming by voting. I might have freaked but under those circumstances, one can only perform calmly as if this is important but not as if the earth under one's feet is trembling. (Field notes, May 12, 1988)

The staff asked questions. I found my excitement growing. The questions included: "If you're doing ethnography, will we have a chance to have input on what you're going to research?" some questions about logistics of the vote, and my lack of clarity about the Native Adult Basic Education program being different from regular Adult Basic Upgrading. The final question was the clincher, "What's in this for the Native Ed Centre?"

I felt that I had stumbled on a critical ethnographer's dream. I responded that I could make no promises, that if the written outcome looked good, it might be helpful in negotiating funding, but that the primary benefit would be to engage in a process together with an opportunity to reflect on the work done here in a more intense way than in day-to-day interaction with one another. The administrator responded that funding was unlikely to be affected, but that public recognition could result. He felt this was an opportunity to communicate to others what the staff already knew themselves and that having a PhD student do it was worthwhile. He also pointed out that what I was doing was not an evaluation, but was rather an effort to represent the Centre.

A teacher talked about what she saw as advantages. She referred to my initial presentation in which I mentioned that academics talking education often ignore First Nations people. If I could contribute to their paying attention, it could have an eventual effect for the NEC, one not necessarily directly measurable but nevertheless significant. I was thrilled at her understanding but felt a little uncomfortable that she was non-Native. Here were two white women in complete understanding trying to convince the staff, some of whom were First Nations, to "let me in." I was asked to leave the meeting at that point so that they could vote.

> I walked around and looked at things. There were three students in the room: two doing work and one guy who I kept thinking was the janitor but he wasn't.
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> I sat down gazing into space, fretting a little. He came over and introduced himself. "I'm Tony," and started chatting. He's been in Vancouver for a year and a half. Quit drinking two and a half years ago. He's a student in the NABE 2/3 class from the Prince Rupert area, Tsimshian.
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> He almost immediately began talking about what he was learning in his class. A film on mercury poisoning—in Wisconsin, I think he said. He said, "The best thing they teach about at this place is respect for the land." He felt people were not thinking about their grandchildren but only about making money. We talked for awhile and then I had to leave. I shook his hand and said, "I hope I see you next Tuesday." I had told him about the staff meeting and that if I was approved, I could come to the student meeting. [The staff meeting had not ended but I had to get home to children.]...
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> So that was my day. I went home with very mixed feelings, but also a sense of calm. This decision by a staff, the majority of whom know me only through the fifteen minute presentation I gave, would affirm a direction I was hoping to take for the next year or would deny me the opportunity. I could do nothing at this point. (Field notes, May 12, 1988)

At 8:42 the next morning, my phone call confirmed the staff's acceptance.

At the student meeting the next week I had only five minutes to talk. I went over the main points covered in the staff meeting, using slightly more casual language. In explaining ethnography, I said, "I like to talk to people." I also emphasized that I was a student myself, and finally that their views of First Nations control were important to me. They applauded when I was done. I found later that they almost always applauded speakers at student meetings. Three people approached me indicating an immediate interest in being involved. I was delighted they were considering it. That was it. The lack of a vote was in some ways disconcerting because it seemed that adult students should have the chance to make a group decision. I reconciled myself to the fact that I had stressed, as with the staff, that only those who chose to be involved would be.

I arranged to attend a board meeting in late August and sent copies of my proposal to each member. At the meeting, I gave a brief overview explaining,

> that I really want feedback, that I can change the proposal and will if they have any concerns. Eva and Sophie both speak very favourably. Samuel asks about access to the final

> product without going through UBC [The University of British Columbia]. I explain that it is no problem and also that I will share the copyright on any published material—not that anyone will get rich. I encourage people to call me or contact me if any questions or comments come up. (Field notes, August 24, 1988)

At that point I felt that the relationship had really begun. Other human beings, staff, students, and board had met me, heard me speak, responded to what I had said, and agreed for the most part to let me work with them. Only the staff had an official vote that I am aware of. Some people told me that three of the staff voted against my coming. One came to me later to explain that she only voted against the project to protest what she saw as too little time to consider the implications and to discuss it among themselves. After reading my proposal, she had decided that she approved of the work. Another was said to vote against anything that the administrator was in favor of, a tantalizing thought in itself.

Direct consent for individual interviews and for observation in classrooms and meetings was a longer though less intense process. I circulated sheets to the classes asking for written permission from the staff to observe classes, to participate in interviews, and to solicit names of students who would agree to be interviewed. Once those were obtained, I selected a number of classes to focus on and began my work in earnest.

Knowledge as a Social Process

Border Ethnography as a Social Process

The work I undertook at the Native Education Centre was an ethnography. It is an investigation of the ways that people who were associated with a particular First Nations adult educational institution talk about and act on their understandings of First Nations control. As an ethnography it does not seek to establish generalizations about all such institutions. Rather, it presents "thick description" (Geertz, 1983) in a particular context that may serve someone else as a guide to the study of other such places. Each detail presented becomes merely a hypothesis when one moves to a new context.

Ethnography as research is based on the direct study of human beings in interaction. Epistemologically, ethnography claims that knowledge, while always tenuous, is best established by doing fieldwork, that is, research with people in the natural settings. As people interact, they create their social realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and derive meaning for the things in their lives from this interaction with one another (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Ethnography is research based on these tenets. As such, it resembles the routine ways that people make sense of their lives. It focuses on the intersubjective negotiation of meaning in what Schutz (1967) calls the "live-in world" of people in "face-to-face" situations. Reality lies in the mutual examination of the world by all the study participants including the principal researcher. The ethnographer begins to establish authority important to the written results by spending time in a place talking with, acting with, and watching the people who dwell there.

Ethnography offers the possibility for a researcher to collaborate with other study participants in creating the kind of knowledge recognized as valid by people in research institutions and governments. Simultaneously, it is based on an approach to the world that, although it challenges the scientific model of knowledge building, cannot escape it. It arises in contestation with the kind of logical-positivist approach that would give us an objective, value-free knowledge. It exists in relation to what has been variously called the Western, European, white, bourgeois, rational, male dominant ideology. It is peopled with members of splinter groups who are struggling to make the business of creating knowledge more democratic.

It has failed miserably in aspects of that struggle. Feminists (e.g., Bell, 1983) point to women's limited and distorted visibility in traditional ethnographies. Members of studied populations feel unrepresented or misrepresented in ethnographies (e.g., Owusu, 1978).

Addressing the concerns of those who see ethnography as "soft," subjective research, ethnographers seek to validate their work, to claim some evident truth in what they produce. Clifford (1988) organizes these struggles to establish authority into four categories. The class ethnography exemplified by Malinowski's works (1922, 1935) relies on "unique personal experience" (Clifford, 1988, p. 26) and training in "the latest analytic technique" (p. 30) as the bases for authoritative work. Those taking interpretivist approaches regard culture as a series of texts and the work of the ethnographers as that of interpreting those texts. In the two former modes of authority, Clifford points out that the other study participants disappear as the text is constructed (p. 40). The dialogic ethnography is one that moves beyond the traditional single voice to include the words of another, usually major, study participant. For example, in *Nisa: The Life and Words of a !Kung Woman,* Marjorie Shostak (1983) alternates her observations with translations of Nisa's comments on the same subject. Moving a step further, Clifford (1988) calls on Bakhtin's heteroglossia to suggest the "poly-phonic" ethnography. While acknowledging the difficulties inherent in such an approach, he sees this type of ethnographic authority arising from several study participants having the opportunity to create and control the outcome of the study as well as the process of developing it. Lather (1986) suggests reconceptualizing validity to include the catalytic so that valid research becomes that which stimulates action on the part of the study participant.

Acknowledging the Human Element

In the process of exploration that is ethnographic research, one may choose to acknowledge the self-reflexive character of study. Those who see "knowledge as contingent" (Whittaker, 1986, p. 73; Gould, 1990) insist on the importance of documenting such details. Other anthropologists view the presentation of self as "'confessionals' tainted either by surreptitious attempts to write autobiographies or by publicizing unnecessary closet guilt" (Whittaker, 1986, p. xx). I identify with the former and feel it most important that a researcher acknowledge her impact on the world she studies. She is irrevocably a part of that world (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 15). Conceding this, the conscientious researcher attempts to make explicit her assumptions (Lather, 1986). She must do this cautiously lest she be accused of narcissism or of doing "vanity ethnography" (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 92). Thus in the study at the Native Education Centre it was significant that I was a white woman of privileged background, working with First Nations people in an institution designed for, and run by, First Nations people, on a topic of current importance to them.

Let me offer an explanation of why I chose to address the diverse meanings of "Indian control of Indian education." Having been involved in First Nations education in a variety of capacities over a number of years, I know how significant this phrase "Indian control" is. I had even begun to use it uncritically myself and to offer it as the solution to whatever problems continued to plague too many First Nations students in educational institutions.

I was fascinated and drawn to the phrase when I saw the accomplishments of a local cultural education society that strongly advocated First Nations control. The Secwepemc Cultural Education Society, located in Kamloops in the building where I had been working with First Nations teachers in training, was engaged in curriculum development, primary research, the establishment of a museum and archives, and publishing, among other things. In a time of funding cutbacks in provincial education, the society managed to find operating grants to run a burgeoning enterprise. If this was Indian control, and people said it was, then Indian control must be good. The apparent irony of a non-Native person talking about "Indian control of Indian education" while working in First Nations education was not lost on me. But I persisted and I do persist.

In a summer course with Afsaneh Eghbal, an anthropologist of Iranian origin who insisted on critical approaches, I was forced to question my assumption that Indian control of Indian education was the answer to the problems that First Nations students were encountering in education. I had developed this view in interaction with many colleagues and students over a number of years. By the time I had finished with her course, I had formed a strong desire to discover what Indian control meant to the people, including myself, who used it so freely. I wondered if they saw similar things or different things from one another and from me. I wondered most of all what my role as a non-Native person might be in Indian-controlled education. If I was to support the principle of First Nations control, it was important that I understand what people meant by it, especially people intimately involved with First Nations. I became very concerned with the document *Indian Control of Indian Education* (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), and pondered its relationship to what I had heard people saying. I remembered that when the document had first appeared I had not read it, feeling somehow that it pertained to First Nations people and not to me. I had focused instead on my role of working with student teachers who just happened to be of First Nations origin. Like most concerned teachers, I knew that students' origins were significant: I wanted to know personal and cultural histories and values of the students with whom I was working. But I had no delusions of being an "expert" in First Nations education. And I held to the myth that somehow I could be outside the politics and, moreover, that I *should* be if I were to do my job properly. My parents had led me to the belief that if one appears nonpartisan, one can appear above politics and thus closer to some "objective truth." Shades of this understanding persisted.

I also sensed that as a non-Native person I should especially not concern myself with First Nations politics; that was for First Nations people alone. I did not judge my position as political in either a partisan way or in the broader sense, which proclaims that education itself is a political act (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 13).

My original interest in conducting a study like this one came with my experience with student teachers and with my knowledge of a variety of First Nations projects around education, particularly the Secwepemc Cultural Education Centre mentioned above. I had been around First Nations people for most of my life. I knew what schools had done with First Nations people for most of my life. I knew what schools had done with First Nations children. I remembered my own elementary schooling from 1952 to 1964, when many of my classmates were from the local reserve and integration was in full swing. When I got to high school with the streamed, "ability grouped" classes of the day, I was never again in a class with a single First Nations student. No one talked about this fact; their absence was assumed to be appropriate.

In my adult life, many people told stories of their experiences at the infamous residential schools. In my magisterial research, I came to a clearer understanding of the power relations within that institution between First Nations people and the so-called dominant society. Many of the students in the residential school had resisted the culture to which they were supposed to have conceded. Families and communities had provided enough support and cultural understanding that many of the students withstood the efforts of church and government to have them abandon their cultures of origin (see Haig-Brown, 1988a). I saw the Native Education Centre as a place to investigate more current relations within the context of an Indian-controlled place. The notion of Indian control seemed inextricably bound to power relations. It seemed to me that a thorough investigation of people's perceptions of Indian control within a single institution could bring me to a clearer understanding of what people meant.

The Tools of Ethnography

The primary tools of the ethnographer, whose whole self is the instrument of research (Dobbert, 1982, p. 5), are interviews and observation. The ethnographic interview (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Mishler, 1986; Spradley, 1979) is open-ended but has some stated structure and purpose. I have come, through this work, to call these interviews *research as conversation*. Although the emphasis is clearly on one side of the conversation, this is often the case with intense personal talks. It provides, like all open-ended interviews, an opportunity for the participant to direct the willing interviewer in mutual exploration. At the same time, I often felt that I should disclose some aspects of my life which related to what the person was saying in reciprocity for their trust and sharing with me. At one point near the end of an interview, I started to talk about my father.

> Celia: I don't know why I'm telling you this. I'm supposed to be interviewing you.
>
> Joseph: No, that's all right. It's nice to listen to you because I prefer coming and giving an interview or more or less a conversation which I'm looking at right now and not an interview. (Field notes, July 5, 1988)

The interview is formal in that it usually occurs in a separate room, with minimal disturbance. For this research, the conversation was recorded and a schedule of questions loosely guided our talk. Unless I forgot, I gave a copy of the questions to the other person so that they had some idea of what direction our conversation might take. Toward the end of the interview, I would glance over the questions to see if there were any major areas we had not addressed. I found that usually most of them had been dealt with.

The formal interview often strongly resembled the intense and intimate conversations one occasionally engages in with a close friend, as over a meal. We sometimes went out to lunch for these conversations, partly to find a somewhat private space removed from the Centre where people could speak more freely, and partly so that I could reciprocate for the time and knowledge people were bringing to the situation. Perhaps because it is only rarely that people have the full attention of another adult human being with the sole purpose of understanding their experience, the interviews often became very intimate.

"In interviews, I ask people to stand naked, to bare themselves, to expose" I wrote in my field notes July 5, 1988. This sense of intimacy may have led the study participants to take some risks in their disclosures. They may later have regretted this openness, or they may have felt very positive about having had the opportunity to talk about aspects of their lives in such detail, and for such a purpose.

Informal interviews, so close to everyday conversations—what I have come to call *research as chat*—are also important in ethnographic research. These may occur at any time, once a researcher becomes familiar to the other people in the place of study. I usually recorded these chats after the fact, as field notes. They often served as an opportunity for people to follow up on more formal interviews or simply to comment generally on the day's significant events, or on details they thought I might have been interested in.

Participant observation (Agar, 1980, p. 114), also an important component of my research, draws on direct participation as an "insider" in a place, with the inescapably "unnatural" aspect of the setting being the intrusion of the researcher. During the course of the study I worked as a student in lectures and workshops, and in some culture and life skills classes, and as a teacher in the Centre. I went through all the complexities of an initial interview, negotiation of salary, planning lessons, and answering to the administrator regarding the organization and delivery of the class. This kind of participation may bring a sensitive research closer to the "native's point of view," a notion introduced by Malinowski (1922, in Kaberry 1957, p. 72) and highlighted by Geertz (1983).

When working with members of traditionally exploited and oppressed groups, a person must continually ask whether ethnography is not just another form of colonization. This form, more subtle than the last, may be so subtle that even those with the best intentions and supposedly critical approaches fail to see that they continue to serve the dominant ideology. Clearly I do not believe that the work I am doing is contributing to oppression or I would not do it. But it is a very real question that we must persist in asking ourselves in light of the many others who have gone before us exploiting in the name of knowledge, serving self, not those with whom we work.

Despite this caution, ethnography is a particularly appropriate form when doing cross-cultural research. It has, of course, arisen primarily out of anthropology, which, regardless of its many shortcomings, has had "other" cultures as a focus of study since its inception. Ethnography provides opportunity for the sensitive interviewer and the interested co-investigator (study participant) to develop mutual understandings as they work together. Although not essential to conventional ethnography, participant involvement becomes possible at every stage in a carefully constructed study. From the framing of the research questions to the final written report, the researcher has the opportunity to structure her working interaction with the other people participating in the study. In my work, I began this process by encouraging people to read my proposal, which was based on previous experience in First Nations education, and to make suggestions. At an initial staff meeting, some people sought confirmation that their input would be taken seriously.

For First Nations people, this possibility for participation holds special significance. Many people involved in First Nations education object to the strong

Eurocentric bias of the langauge and concepts in some studies conducted by academics (Field notes, February 1988). Much research based on First Nations has been extremely exploitative. Although Whittaker (1986) acknowledges that "all research is exploitative," First Nations people have been subjected to too many researchers who use the information they gather for personal and professional benefit without giving anything back to the people. In addition, failure to check back with the people can lead to inaccurate and unfair representations and to a sense of objectification on the part of the "studied subjects."

There is another reason that ethnography is a particularly suitable approach to research with First Nations people. The behavior of the trained ethnographer is in some ways congruent with the behavior expected of learners in many traditional First Nations cultures. Learners are expected to listen and to observe. Although there are clearly limitations to this analogy, ethnographic interviews and observations do emphasize learning through listening and watching. Learning the language of the people, the ethnographer attempts to come to know the world of the other study participants with as little disruption as possible.

At the same time, one must be constantly expectant that people may censor their comments based on their beliefs about who one is. In one interview, a young man referred to "the land which we once may have had." Because I firmly believe that aboriginal rights have never been settled in British Columbia, I responded "You still have."

Joseph: Well, we still do. I don't really know sometimes about the terms that I should use, you know.

Celia: I know, You're being polite, right?

Joseph: Well, I guess so, you know. Actually I don't know if I would hurt your feelings in any way, or else if I should, if it would.

This opening led to his description of a racist incident in a bank after which he "could just feel the anger building up." His politeness was leading him to protect me from thoughts and incidents that he felt might be interpreted as anger toward me.

Watching and Learning

Although I did some work before and during the summer of 1988, I felt that the work really began in September with the new classes starting and most of the permissions in place including an approved proposal. I decided to focus on observations to start with. I sat in the library and read annual reports. I sat in the main hall, a lounge and meeting room, and talked to passers-by and listened to conversations around me. I went to the annex in a nearby office building where a number of the programs were temporarily located while the addition was being built. I sat in on the classes of the programs on which I was deciding to focus. I looked at how people's understanding of Indian control translated into action within the Centre. I wandered around, looking at architecture, bulletin boards, and people engaged in many processes.

And through all of it I thought about First Nations control. I could not keep my eyes off the many exciting things going on around me that might or might not relate directly to the topic of study. I made field notes, always pondering which details to select from the bombardment of sensory perceptions in any given environment. My notes themselves comment, "Is this a field note? All this mind rambling? I should be recording the physical details" (May 29, 1988). For about three months I focused on observing. Although there was no tidy separation, no day when I left observing, the time came when my focus shifted to interviewing.

Interviewing: The Conversations

The interviews form the nucleus of the study. I set out to investigate what people said Indian control of Indian education meant to them. In order to provide a context for what people said about control, the interview schedule began with questions about roles in the Centre. Biographical questions emphasizing involvement in education further located their statements. The third section dealt directly with people's beliefs about control. What does Indian control mean? Is it important? Is this place Indian-controlled? Are you familiar with the document called *Indian Control of Indian Education*? Another section focuses on Native values. The final one deals with the relationship between the education for individual students provided by the Centre and general social change for First Nations people. All schedules end with the question, "What questions should I have asked you which I didn't?"

Despite the rather extensive list of questions, we did not necessarily follow them or cover all the topics. I wanted to leave space for people to present issues that they thought I should hear. During the conversations, one person reworded a question that he thought should be different. Another brought me back to some of the questions that we had not discussed that were important to her. Two people simply said, "That's enough," when they grew tired of talking or ran out of time. My desire to know the person's history in order to place his or her ideas of control within that context occasionally led to our spending so much time on life history that we talked very little about control.

I began my interviews with students, then moved to board members, and finally focused on staff members. The students, all of First Nations origins, provided clear definition of the kind of people the Centre attracted: primarily those who had had some negative experience with school previously or who had been away from school for some time. Some of them had thought about self-government and First Nations control before coming to the Centre, but many were being introduced to these issues. This introduction came indirectly in classes through looking at history of First Nations peoples and more directly through presentations by the large variety of guest speakers at the Centre. Most of the board members, also all First Nations people, had been involved in First Nations education in many capacities. All of them had thought extensively about First Nations control. Most of the staff, which included non-Native people, were also very aware of the moves by First Nations peoples to control education. Some of the two latter groups had knowledge of the document; most had not read it. Almost none of the students knew of the document.

The First Reflection

I interviewed 23 current and two former staff members, 17 students, and five current and two former board members. Some of the staff were also former students.

All the tapes were transcribed by me and two other people I hired to work with me. This in itself was an experience. Although we had clarified issues of confidentiality, I had not anticipated the impact of the transcribers' asides. Both occasionally commented on what they were transcribing. The comments from one were pleasant interruptions, but interruptions nonetheless. At one point, she wrote, "[The long lovely sound of water being poured]" which was actually tea at the table of the person with whom I was talking. As she transcribed the following, "Autonomy means real respect for the other, and the other could be a tulip," she added, "I don't know if the word is really 'tulip,' but I like the sound of it!]." The word really was tulip.

These were minor distractions compared with the editorial cuts and comments made by the other transcriber. He frequently had trouble understanding what people were saying and just put an (I) to indicate that he could not transcribe at that point. He seemed somewhat selective in what he could hear. For example, in one transcript, he typed the following "J: I feel the strength. (I)...the guys, we don't have too many guys in our class, but native men are nonconformist." When I listened to the tape as I did with all his transcriptions, I heard:

> J: I feel the strength. Being with Indian people. But I also feel it being with women. Like, I really—there is a strength there. So, I'm a female chauvinist. I keep on bugging the guys. We don't have too many guys in our class, but Native men are known to be chauvinistic.

In the middle of another transcript, he typed beside a word he was having difficulty with "(this is NOT racist, many of these people simply do NOT enunciate!! this obviously makes my job much harder)." Unfortunately, I did not read this transcript until near the end of the interviews he transcribed or I would have looked elsewhere for a transcriber.

Accurate transcripts are important to me. Losing context and expression, I remain committed to the idea that there is some kind of truth inherent in at least getting the words right. When I want to represent what people have said, I use extensive quotations. When these quotations are clearly separated from the words of the ethnographer, readers have available at least portions of the primary sources on which the ethnography is based. It is then possible to consider alternative ways of organizing and presenting what people have said. Although she is writing about quoting others' writing, Donovan (1985) notes:

> I have elected to include liberal citations from the theorists themselves because I wanted to convey the flavor of their rhetoric as well as the substance of their ideas, and so to be as faithful as possible to the detail of their thought. (p. xii)

For people whose traditional cultures are oral, I feel it most important to include their words verbatim in order to preserve that aspect of their speech. Clearly moving the word from conversation where its context includes a particular environment, history, body language, and expression and to transfer it to paper where it lies still, waiting for a reader in some other context, transforms it beyond recognition. Yet I believe that the printed word can convey much of the speaker's original intent if the writer places it carefully and sensitively in its new context and seeks approval for that placement with the person who spoke. This is a truth for which the ethnographer strives.

Submission to Theory

When I got to what I see now as second reflection stage, I did two things. I began to struggle with a way to organize this wealth of information I had garnered. And I began to review and investigate further some notions from the literature that seemed to me integral to the study: culture, contradiction, and power relations. The first was significant in that the study investigated people of First Nations cultures working for control of education; the second emerged from the work as it progressed. Power relations as developed by Foucault (1980) was the final investigation that eventually came to frame the study. I found it most appropriate to what I had seen in the Centre and in the work that I had done with First Nations people before. I found that I could incorporate it into the study, which was in a sense already complete, without doing violence to the understandings to which people had led me. Indeed, it seemed to clarify and inform the issues raised in my interactions in the Centre.

To paraphrase Eisenstein (1988), although I am indebted to Foucault for parts of my analysis, my work is not meant to be an explication of his. Neither is it intended to serve the development of universal theory. It is not the definitive analysis of First Nations control of education or even of the Native Education Centre. It is a representation of one person's efforts to understand a place through fieldwork circumscribed by the world of academe. It is an effort to represent in a way acceptable to all the study participants and to a university doctoral committee an open-textured analysis of some experiences and interactions between human beings and between human beings and text. As text itself, its usefulness, cohesiveness, truthfulness lie with the readers as well as the writer. This is not to downplay my responsibility for any error this work may include or pain it may cause people, but to acknowledge the degree of control that lies beyond me, the power relations between me and others.

This effort to bring together my empirical work with some theoretical writing was a major effort: I struggled with the desire to present the study as I had done it, always knowing that I could only achieve some limited representation. My desire to make it speak to those in the world of academe, to contribute to the discourse of control and education in a way that could not be ignored or marginalized, required that at some point I surrender to theory.

The study of contradiction, which became something of an epilogue in my thesis, was the first step in this tactical submission. After a long time in "the field," in the Centre, I found myself frequently thinking of contradiction. At the same time, my thoughts were not of logical contradiction, but of a tension central to the development of the Centre and of many of the students who were working there (Mao Tse-Tung, 1986). The epilogue brings together some pieces of what people said and did with my own conceptual "digging" around the notion of contradiction (Norman & Sayers, 1980). I wrote the conceptual parts before I worked through the interviews and added the empirical work after I completed the other chapters on the centre.

Focus and Order

After delving into contradiction, I began coding the interviews. I decided against the computer despite the fact that nearly all my transcripts are on disk. I felt more comfortable with pen and paper, reading and rereading, and trying to find a pattern that would bring organization. I began making notes and attaching them to each interview. Out of these notes, I identified emergent categories. The list grew and grew. As I closed the cover of one file folder and moved to the next, I forgot what I had seen. A sense of chaos reigned. My partner recommended colored highlighters. I collapsed the categories to a manageable six, began marking the files in Technicolor, and making lists of references on particular topics.

> At first I wasn't sure how it would work. It was a tremendous relief after the first chapter using the marks to find that they worked quite well. By the time I got to the process chapters, I could see that it worked very well indeed. (Note May 23, 1990)

At this point, "working" meant that what I considered the salient points were coming into focus in one category or another. I tried to visualize chapters based partly on my proposal and more clearly on what I had seen. Eventually, when the writing was nearly done, as I pushed through all the chapters with a major edit, I realized that all the chapters were about control. Each is a tentative approach from a particular position: histories, geography and physical space, the people, the programs and curriculum, the direct words, and finally relationship of control to a theoretical construct that appealed to me, contradiction.

Contextualization is important. It spirals through the thesis with each chapter. After the fieldwork was over but before the writing of the ethnographic chapters, I decided to include an historical overview of First Nations taking control of education, referring to a variety of government transcripts and other documents.

Our reliance on existing documentary evidence to reconstruct the shifting relations between First Nations people and Euro-Canadians around education is highly problematic. Historical documents, because of their predominantly Eurocentric focus, are particularly limiting in attempts to reconstruct First Nations' roles and responses to the changes occurring in their lands.

Nevertheless, I spent a number of days in the library of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs looking for First Nations responses to education as revealed in documents. I used these responses as the foundation for an initial historical chapter to argue that First Nations had been seeking control for a long time. I used an interview with the first teacher-manager of the Centre along with news clippings and other articles to reconstruct some of the history of the Centre as the next layer of context.

From there, I moved to three "Ps": the place, the people, the practices. More context. In order to make sense of what people say about control, one can place their words within a physical context, the place, and in a social context, with people. Ultimately, their practices as revealed in programs and curriculum in the Centre demonstrate further the complexities of control. In the final chapter following the consideration of programs, the people speak specifically about what control means to them.

Another step in organizing came with another spiralling move, a return to the document *Indian Control of Indian Education* in each chapter of the ethnography proper. The four areas of focus: responsibility, programs, teachers, and facilities fit compatibly with the organizers I had chosen. The more I considered the document and its emphasis on local control, the more I realized how comprehensive and appropriate to a wide variety of contexts it was. From these considerations the chapter outline became firm.

Writing on the Border

As I had been pursuing the literature on contradiction, I began to write a chapter that focused on the major concepts in the study. It was to be "The Theory Chapter." By the time I was done, I felt satisfied that this research could play some role in the thesis, but not as the central organizing focus that I was still seeking. My committee felt strongly that it was something of a tangent. This chapter had since disappeared into segments throughout the thesis positioned where they relate to the things that people told me. The next chapter I wrote was the history of the Centre. I was by this time craving to use the interviews, the words of the people, rather than just my own and those from books.

Moving out of the history chapter, I was somewhat clear in my direction. One chapter of the ethnography after another rolled onto the pages. At times I was frustrated with the tedious process of putting into text the thoughts of yesterday and the day before. Talk is so much more efficient but so soon gone in my culture. As I worked at the chapters, I wondered constantly if they were meaningfully organized.

> May 20, 1990.
> I have just finished the draft of People which I find most unsatisfying. I ended it with a section on Samuel. But the disconcerting part is that I am laying out segments of people's histories which seem significant to me without saying why they are significant. I am laying them out in such a way that they speak to my eventual deeper analysis or disruption of the way things are. It seems too narrative and not enough of substance. And at the same time I am very aware that everything I have done so far is an analysis, an overlay of what I think is important about what I experienced and observed. Somehow the way I am laying out the pieces of lives without a lot of commentary is an effort to present the information which I gathered through participation with others with minimal disruption. That way those who are reading can see more clearly the process which leads me to the conclusions and deeper observations with which I end the thesis. But perhaps I am not saying enough by following this tactic.

This uncertainty persists. But I feel that my decision to proceed this way was well grounded. It is in some ways an attempt to resist theory for as long as possible, which is, of course, theory in itself (de Man, 1986). In another way, it is a resistance to linearity. My experiences at the Centre were not linear. I did not clearly understand one thing and then move to another. Rather, with each person with whom I spoke and with each day I was there, my understanding deepened. I now see each chapter as a sign of this deepening understanding that spirals out to the chapters on control and contradiction. While their specific focus is control, all the other chapters are about control as well. Each one is another layer that serves simultaneously as foundation and as source for the following chapters.

By the time I got to the chapter called "Practices," I could see the end. As I reviewed the interviews and field notes time and time again, I began to see that many of the important points had been incorporated into the three chapters already written. With only two remaining, I could see how other pieces would fit nicely into them. At the end I planned to write the chapter based on what you are reading now. For a variety of mundane reasons, I jumped to the initial draft of this chapter before the final two, but returned to it at the end to complete several sections.

Re-visions

In this work, I brought what I wrote back to the people. I could not go back to all the people if I ever wanted to finish, even if I could have found them. But I worked with some members of each group, board, staff, and students, seeking criticism.

> I see analysis as a series of deepening disruptions. Disruptions, ruptures, with the intent of presenting a clear description as the foundation for a clear argument. Or explanation. And circling back, all explanations are hypotheses. I test this set by taking it back to the people to see if my explanation-description coincides with theirs or is at least not a violation of theirs. (Field notes, May 20, 1990)

When I took part of one chapter and the whole of another to some study participants as I was still writing, I received very helpful comments. Two of the people asked that I drop the pseudonyms and use their real names because they felt that I had done a fair job of representing what they had told me. They also asked for specific changes in wording to reflect more accurately the way they see. One person asked that where I had used the word "begged," I substitute "asked." "I've never begged for anything in my life," he said. One person wanted me to include her clan and band name with her name. In some nodding deference to external validity, I gave one chapter to a First Nations student in another program who found the analysis suitable and sensible. I found this reality check reassuring. Sometimes I worried that people asked for no changes out of politeness. At other times, I wondered how I could be so patronizing (matronizing) to think that a person when asked would not say what she thinks.

With the initial draft complete, I took the thesis to the Centre for formal feedback. I left 10 copies in the library for circulation. I distributed copies to a few key individuals, five board members, five staff, and two students, just to be sure they had every opportunity to respond. I attended a student meeting and held two special meetings for board, staff, and student comments. I also made myself available for individual meetings if anyone desired. I spent hours on the phone with those who were too far away for meetings.

And there were suggestions for changes. A few factual details, Cree was offered as a night school course once, to some concerns about the need for a subtle shift in emphasis. Only one person asked me to change a direct quote and he was concerned about a single word. Another felt that a personal detail was too clearly associated with an individual and I needed to restate it with more anonymity. And there were limits to the changes I was prepared to make. I incorporated much of what had concerned people, recirculated the document to a major critic and when he did not respond, assumed that silence was a good sign. Time led me to short cut, as did the realization that the process of making everyone happy with my representation of the Centre was probably unachievable.

Gender Analysis

I struggled intensely with the role that gender analysis would play in my work. Many of the First Nations women, in all the roles they have in the Centre, are very powerful people, intimately involved in the power relations there. Although gender issues are as significant to First Nations people as they are in all cultures, I did not systematically address gender issues throughout the study. In the face of the racism of the majority society, I found myself focusing more consistently on culture and ethnicity. Gender and class issues, while evident in the thesis, require additional, similarly intense study.

First Nations gender issues, because of the diversity of cultures represented in BC, require clearly situated analysis. The racist nature of society complicates these issues further. In many First Nations communities, as in the larger society, women are dealing with and working against oppressive male ways. In a recent article

(Haig-Brown, 1988b), one woman referred to this situation as part of the legacy of colonization. Ardith Wilson, of the Git'ksan Nation commented on the Indian Act, that special compendium of federal law that applies only to First Nations people and which Lee Maracle, a Vancouver author, has cited as evidence of Canada's apartheid system. Wilson considers the Act patriarchal, a male model that the Department of Indian Affairs has promoted. She points out that this non-Native system "never did envelope the system that we had in the feast house." While recognizing the traditional respect afforded women in her society, she said, "We cannot look at the world through rose-coloured glasses. Wife abuse, rape and child abuse are all realities" (Haig-Brown, 1988b, p. 20). In a recent article, Osennontion, a Kanien'keha:ka woman, summed up the complexity:

> I could never separate my gender from my origin.... We attempt to get the "others" to understand that we encounter problems and obstacles that often times go far beyond those that are referred to as "women's issues".... Despite the fact that these "others" claimed to want to support us "in the struggle" ... we often times cannot distinguish the "female" view from the "male," and so we find ourselves dealing with maternalism, as well as paternalism. In Nairobi, at the Women's Forum, I was especially appalled with the behaviour of women toward other women. (Osennontion & Skonaganleh, 1989, p. 1415)

The roles of First Nations women in traditional cultures, the history of their issues, is significant to a consideration of gender. Conventional anthropology has been challenged for too often basing its analyses in an ethnocentric view of women's roles as inferior. Etienne comments:

> Overtly stated acceptance of the status quo is less prevalent today among anthropologists than it was several decades ago; but implicit or explicit belief in the universal subordination of women, if not in its inevitability, continues to obstruct efforts to understand both other societies and our own. (Etienne & Leacock, 1979, p. 2)

If one questions the universal, one comes to understand that the struggles of particular First Nations women are different from those of other First Nations women and non-Native women. Acknowledging the serious problems that accompany any attempts to generalize about the various First Nations cultures, I turn to Allen's (1986) statement that they are "more often gynocratic than not and they are never patriarchal" (p. 2). *Gynocratic* in Allen's work is used interchangeably with gynocentric and refers to a woman-focused world view. Osennontion comments,

> In our Nation, while there is no question that the woman is the central figure in the scheme of things, our official government leaders are still men ... this, too, becomes the responsibility of the women, for we have to select and groom the men for these positions. (Osennontion & Skonagenleh, 1989, p. 14)

Because of the complexities of the relationships in the Centre, and because I was caught up in the other aspects of the struggles there, I did not do justice to gender issues. At the same time, my concern with gender is revealed in this section and throughout the study. I included a question about gender relations in most of the interviews. It stimulated varied responses. Some people had not considered gender an issue; others shied away from it. One person asked that I turn off the tape recorder before she responded. Still others raised gender issues and feminism as part of their responses to other parts of the interviews.

I include here a few examples of these vastly differing views. On one occasion, a young student spoke very forcefully about her feminism.

> I'm a feminist. I don't care if you don't like what I have to say. But I'm going to tell you now that you're not going to leave women on the bottom. We can be just as powerful—if not more powerful—than men in any position. And nobody's going to tell me any different as long as I'm on student council.

A non-Native instructor credited her success with students to her "feminist background" which had given her insight into people taking control of their lives. On the other hand, a board member spoke disparagingly of aspects of the feminist movement:

> One of the main difficulties I had with it [women's liberation], it was just like that old scenario of the people who are oppressed becoming the oppressor.... I also feel that groups such as that will try to latch on to our struggle.... I learned that lesson about 1975, when in Toronto, the Marxist-Leninists took into their ranks a high profile Native man and used him.

She went on to speak of women's roles, traditionally and now:

> In our own history, but also since recorded history, women have always been the ones who have done a lot of the work, the ground work and a lot of the clearing. Even in the Indian movement, it really has been a lot of the women have done the work. Just in my own thinking, I haven't read it anywhere, but about what has happened historically to Native people and Native men feeling, I don't know if emasculated is the right word, but something like that because of what's happened to us in colonization. I think that because they were typically the ones who were out there providing for the family, the woman was sort of in the background. When the reserve system came in and the cash economy came in and the welfare and all that, Native men just lost a whole lot of their inner strength and power. Somehow, because of a need, a necessity, or maybe it was a natural sense from within, that women have had to step in. As far as it being significant, I don't really think that it is that significant when you look at it that way, in terms of our history and what has happened to the men. I really feel, I don't know if it's sympathy or what it is that I feel, for a lot of the Native men because it's tragic. A lot of Native men have been able to pull themselves out of that, but for some it has just broken their spirits. It's true for Native women too, but I think maybe to a lesser extent.

Another board member said succinctly: "I've never thought of Native women as secondary. We are important to our Nations. If it wasn't for us, we wouldn't have anybody."

These examples demonstrate some of the complexities of gender issues that the people who work in and around the Centre see. The difficulty of doing justice to an analysis that addresses class, ethnicity, and gender is one with which researchers continue to struggle. A good example of the complexity is the current constitutional debate in Canada, where gender issues make the complex issue of control in the context of inherent aboriginal rights even more complex: some First Nations women are clear that they want the Canadian Bill of Rights to supersede any First Nations' governments' legislation or custom with respect to gender differentiation (Platiel, 1992). First Nations women are publicly divided on the issues of reconciliation of colonial and exploitive interests with First Nations customs, definition of customs, and with their experiential history of the past 100 or so years.

Throughout the research, there were clear gender issues. There are also clearly powerful women. I have not singled them out because, as the quotations above indicate, their relations in the Centre are not single gender issues. At the same time, gender cannot and should not be ignored.

Summary

One could call this a methodology piece. It is much more than that to me because I feel that ethnography is always more than a method. Its epistemology assumes the social construction of knowledge. Its purposes, congruent with those of theorists like Foucault, are to reveal local knowledges in our efforts to understand. With him it insists on a degree of relativism that prohibits grand theory from directing the process or rising out of it.

The article lays out for you some of what I did and some of how I did it. In that it gives you method. It also tells you much of what I thought about and in that it gives you more than method. Its purpose is to provide a moment of comparison for academics who choose the border, to work on research that may serve the struggles of the people there.

Note

Throughout this paper, I have used the terms *First Nations, Native,* and *Indian.* George Bush will be happy to know that many Canadians consider First Nations the current politically correct term in that it acknowledges the primacy of the people's presence in what non-Native people and others have come to call North America, and acknowledges as well their diversity, and their organization into politically cohesive groups. *Native* continues to be used by many. It designates people whose ancestors include indigenous people, but is somewhat confusing as the conventional use means born in a particular country. The word *Indian,* of course, is rooted in the mistake of the lost explorer who stumbled unwittingly onto a land he had not anticipated. Its long history among First Nations people and others remains evident in people's words and in existing documents.

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