

“OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP THE LAND ALIVE”: VOICES OF NORTHERN INDIGENOUS RESEARCHERS

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ABSTRACT

This paper is based on experiences, views, and stories shared by the 22 participants who spoke at the *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop at the Northern Governance Policy Research Conference in November 2009. The paper does not address all the issues raised, but rather focuses specifically on how the workshop sheds new light on the nature of alternative Indigenous research that would support Indigenous governance. The sharing circle format of the workshop is considered as a model reflecting the research paradigm being talked about. This paradigm requires a critique of past northern “Indigenous” research that perpetuates colonial concepts of governance. Key messages from the groundbreaking work of the Traditional Knowledge Practitioners Group in 2008–2009 are combined with narratives from the

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1. This paper would not be possible without the contributions of participants in the *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop at the Northern Governance and Policy Research Conference (NGPRC), November 5, 2009. The large number of participants that chose to participate in the workshop was a surprise to the coordinators — approximately 30 people were in attendance, and 22 of these shared a story. Verbal permission to record and transcribe the workshop proceedings was obtained at the inception of the workshop. Highlights from the workshop were aired numerous times on the Native Communication Society’s radio station CKLB. The entire transcript was reviewed as the basis for this paper, but only the nine individuals directly quoted in this paper were given an opportunity to review drafts. Each of these has given express consent for use of their quotes, and has provided feedback on the paper as a whole. Special thanks to Alestine Andre, Lia Ruttan, and Celine Mackenzie Vukson who provided detailed input. Thanks also to the two anonymous reviewers whose suggestions helped us to strengthen the paper.

workshop to provide a picture of current thinking about Indigenous research in the North, and practical considerations in applying this paradigm. Indigenous people have always been engaged in research processes as part of their ethical “responsibility to keep the land alive.”

Keywords: governance, research methodologies, northern studies, traditional knowledge, colonialism

INTRODUCTION

The *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop held at the Northern Governance and Policy Research Conference (NGPRC) in November 2009 marks a watershed in the collective validation of Indigenous research methodologies. This workshop provided a space for dialogue about the ways in which research can support contemporary Indigenous governance processes in the North. Participants were encouraged to come prepared to talk about examples of research from their own experience and perspectives. The stories shared by the workshop participants challenged a number of assumptions about how research has been (and continues to be) conducted in the North. Participants pointed out that colonial research approaches are still practiced. They argued that until northern Indigenous peoples begin to take control of their own research agenda, achieving Indigenous governance will remain elusive. To enact research that is rooted in the values and traditions of Indigenous peoples in the North, a dramatically different research paradigm is required.

This paper explores how the experiences, views, and stories shared by workshop participants shed new light on the nature of an alternative Indigenous research paradigm to inform Indigenous governance. The paper explores implications of the recommendations put forward at the NGPRC that the “contributions and experience of Elders and Indigenous research experts” should be recognized, and that governance research should “honour local knowledge and customs” (NGPRC, 2009, 1, 4). This requires a critique of past northern “Indigenous” research that perpetuated colonial concepts of governance. A brief review of the literature demonstrates the need for Indigenous research in governance, and situates the northern methodologies that are the focus of this paper in relation to more broadly based methodological discussions amongst scholars working with Indigenous communities. This workshop is not the first initiative to address the question of northern Indigenous research. Challenges to conventional research methodologies have been simmering for some time, as demonstrated by

the groundbreaking work of the ad hoc Traditional Knowledge Practitioners Group in 2008 and 2009 that served as the catalyst for the *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop. The Practitioners Group adopted the slogan that serves as the title of this paper, referring to the ethical responsibility “to keep the land alive” inherent in Indigenous research.

Finally the paper highlights the sharing circle format of the workshop as well as narratives shared in order to unfold the specific meaning of northern Indigenous research as it has been experienced by workshop participants. In this context, a key message from the workshop is perhaps not only that Indigenous research can shed light on governance, but that it is in itself an enactment of governance. The three-hour workshop was extraordinarily rich, and it is not possible to fully address its implications within this paper. It is intended that this paper be followed by two additional papers addressing themes that emerged from the *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop, including reflections on the nature of Indigenous governance, and on experiences in traditional knowledge research.

CONTEXT

Indigenous peoples in the North have strong traditions in decision making and governance based on the best knowledge available to them. Indigenous governance has been grounded in deep understandings of the people and the land, including ancient knowledge passed down orally through the generations, measured against and responsive to more recent experiences. Over time, traders, missionaries, and RCMP attempted to compel the adoption of their own practices as normative. The imposition of colonial governance systems in the 20th century involved the forcible marginalization, fragmentation and even systematic destruction of Indigenous knowledge processes by a variety of means, not the least of which were the residential school system and the band governance regulations enforced through the Indian Act. Nevertheless, insofar as Indigenous peoples have maintained their own languages, connections with the land, and knowledge systems, they also continue to govern themselves in the old way. It was in response to the first proposal for a pipeline in the Mackenzie Valley in the 1970s that Dene, Métis, and Inuit leaders began to harness research as a means of challenging colonial policy. Indigenous peoples initiated major research programs as the basis for defending their land rights, formulating comprehensive land claims and intervening in resource management decisions. Aware that they were required to legitimate their research in a terrain not of their own mak-

ing, Indigenous leaders established collaborations with non-Indigenous academic researchers and consultants, and adopted methodologies that could be validated on the basis of conventional academic standards while remaining grounded in respect for the knowledge of elders and relationships with the land.

Since that period, some literature has been published about the evolution of “participatory” research methodology through the history of such collaborations between “outsiders” and Indigenous researchers in the North (Ryan and Robinson, 1990; Robinson, 1996; Caine et al., 2007). However, Indigenous researchers scattered across the vast northern regions have had little opportunity to share and document their perspectives on the nature of Indigenous research and its implications for governance. The *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop provided a unique opportunity for such collective reflection, involving a broad range of Indigenous researchers and a handful of non-Indigenous researchers with a strong interest in community-based knowledge processes. The workshop shed light on the current state of Indigenous research nearly forty years after its inception as a deliberate strategic tool, both by modelling a variant of Indigenous research in the workshop itself, and through the accumulation of stories from a wide variety of experiences. The workshop reaffirmed and deepened the message that northern Indigenous governance research must continue to glean knowledge from people’s ancient and ongoing relationships with each other and with the land, and from the old and new stories that describe and analyze these relationships.

Indigenous research coexists uncomfortably with externally driven social scientific questions and approaches that have gained renewed legitimacy in recent years as the basis for self-government negotiations and cooperative resource management. A comparison of Indigenous research with other approaches is outside the scope of this paper; here we focus more narrowly on the nature and value of northern Indigenous research.

DECOLONIZING RESEARCH: A CRITIQUE OF “INDIGENOUS” RESEARCH

The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) notes that “most research about the North — and indeed, most written knowledge about it — has been collected by southerners and held in southern institutions” (RCAP, 1993, 19). Frances Abele (2006) makes a similar point

in her discussion paper on northern policy development. The NGPRC recommendations document concurs:

In the past, Northerners in small communities have been the subject of scientific inquiry that has not always directly benefited them, has not always incorporated their ways of knowing or been aligned with community goals for development of problem solving. (2009, 4)

The disjuncture between externally driven research and local questions and ways of knowing is arguably felt most acutely by Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples represent one of the most researched cultural groups in the world (“studied to death” as it were) (RCAP, 1993; Smith, 1999), and certainly this is true of Aboriginal peoples in the North. It is increasingly recognized that many current research approaches and methods serve to perpetuate colonization processes. RCAP argues that prevailing research approaches have historically mitigated against Indigenous questions and interests being addressed.

In the past, research concerning Aboriginal peoples has usually been initiated outside the Aboriginal community and carried out by non-Aboriginal personnel. Aboriginal Peoples have had almost no opportunity to correct misinformation or to change ethnocentric and racist interpretations. Consequently, the existing body of research, which normally provides a reference point for new research, must be open to reassessment. (RCAP, 1996, 29)

Conversely, as Mohawk scholar Marlene Brant Castellano asserts, “fundamental to the exercise of self-determination is the right of peoples to construct knowledge in accordance with self-determined definitions of what is real and what is valuable” (2004, 102). Decolonizing and self-determining research approaches are called for that affirm Indigenous worldviews, philosophies, knowledge, and values (Wilson, 2008; Steinhauer, 2002; Absolon and Willet, 2004). The emerging Indigenous research paradigm in Canada calls for conducting research *by* and *with* (as opposed to *on*) Indigenous people. This necessitates in-depth knowledge and experience with colonizing and subsequent decolonizing processes (McNaughton and Rock, 2003). It is imperative that theoretical research frameworks are developed to reflect this contradictory reality.

Indigenous theoretical frameworks, methods, and applications will be necessarily diverse, reflecting the diversity, context, and traditions of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The fundamental commonality in Indigenous research approaches and methods is the need to reflect Indigenous rela-

tionships to the environment, the land, and the ancestors (Cardinal, 2001; Peltier Sinclair, 2003). There is a sacred basis to research grounded in the natural world (Colorado 1988, 5). Indigenous research is premised on natural law which is tied to Indigenous peoples' responsibilities to the natural world and thus encompasses a range of codes of conducts and canons of behaviour (Peltier Sinclair, 2003, 128). Indigenous researchers are not required to "separate" themselves from the research; they must rather approach it holistically and maintain responsibilities to family, communities, the environment, and the spirit world (Wilson, 2001). Indigenous research involves learning about ways of sustaining proper relationships "with all of Creation" (McGregor, 2004). It goes beyond the objectified research topics privileged in scientific approaches, encompassing relationships between the researcher and the researched. In this research paradigm, knowledge is shared, not extracted or owned. For the most part, purely traditional modalities of Indigenous research described here are not possible in the contemporary context. Most Indigenous research now takes place in a negotiated cross-cultural space involving a hybrid of externally imposed questions, objectives, and methods with questions, objectives, and methods emergent from Indigenous communities — a reflection of the hybrid reality that is the experience of contemporary indigeneity.²

RESEARCH THE INDIGENOUS WAY: A NEW MODEL FOR NORTHERN RESEARCH

In the Northwest Territories, the concept of Indigenous research has been largely channeled within the negotiated discourse of "traditional knowledge" (Ellis, 2005; Legat, 1991; Ruttan, 2005). Traditional knowledge (TK) was defined and its role recognized in the first comprehensive land claims agreements in the Western Arctic (Inuvialuit, 1984; Gwich'in, 1992; Sahtu, 1993), and in the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act (Canada, 1998). The role of Indigenous research was first systematically explored by the TK Working Group chaired by Alice Legat, which had its roots in an informal group that began meeting in Yellowknife in 1986. The group was mandated as a Ministerial Committee in 1988 to define TK, assess its current institutional use in the NWT (which then included Nunavut), and develop policy recommendations toward increasing its use and application.

2. For a theoretical discussion of hybridity, see Bhabha (1997; 1998).

Elders from across the NWT participated in the discussions, which led to the publication of a final report in 1991.

The TK Working Group report made a series of recommendations toward strengthening support for Indigenous research, which in that document was conflated with TK research. The NWT TK Policy established in 1993 did recognize the need to support TK initiatives within communities. However, for the most part the NWT policy framework tended to lead toward objectification of TK as something that needed to be “preserved” and “considered.” Indigenous research processes remained marginalized and poorly understood; the prevailing tendency was to privilege use of standard social science approaches to documenting TK and validating it through integration or incorporation within scientific research processes (as observed by Nadasdy in the Yukon, 2003) while framing the research as “participatory” (Caine et al., 2007).

The Government of the NWT’s Science Agenda issued in November 2009 recognizes TK as a “knowledge framework” with specific applications in the domain of cultural sustainability. A priority identified within this domain is “effective community-driven and community-based research and methodologies in cultural and traditional knowledge topics” (NWT, 2009b, 7). This creates an important opening for Indigenous research, while limiting its scope to culture and TK. To be sure, TK is considered to be one of the three cross-cutting themes in the NWT Science Agenda. However, as with the NWT traditional knowledge policy, the theme’s broader interest is mainly with respect to its “incorporation and use,” linked to the need for methodological innovation in incorporating both TK and conventional science (2009a, 18). In calling for innovation, the Agenda implicitly acknowledges ongoing failures of such integrative approaches since the inception of TK policy. Critiques of knowledge integration (for example Cruikshank, 1981; Nadasdy, 2003; Ellis, 2005) have yet to be addressed by policymakers in the NWT.

As the NWT Science Agenda was being developed, a grouping of TK practitioners was working to develop a deeper understanding of Indigenous research and its role in governance and resource management. Sponsored by the Yamózha Kúé Society (formerly the Dene Cultural Institute), an ad hoc network of people from the five regions of the NWT came together in 2008 to share experiences in preserving and revitalizing Indigenous knowledge, with a focus on how this knowledge is used in monitoring and decision

making.³ Most of the people in the group possess decades of experience in TK research dating back to the 1970s and 1980s when the first round of debates about pipeline development in the Mackenzie Valley were waged through the medium of the Berger Inquiry, and Indigenous peoples of the North came to realize that it would be necessary to reclaim their homelands in order to prevent complete dispossession (Abel, 1993).

TK research emerged as the discipline that established the basis and legitimacy of Dene, Inuvialuit, and Métis land rights and nationhood. Major oral history, mapping, and translation projects were undertaken in collaboration with non-Aboriginal allies (for a sampling, see Watkins, 1977). The Dene Nation was born, and the Inuvialuit and Denendeh Land Claim Agreements were forged. There are many examples of collaborative TK research involving both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers during and since that time that has, in the words of Alestine Andre, “empowered and instilled a sense of well-being, mental, physical, emotional, spiritual good health in their Elders, youth and community people”⁴ Nearly four decades later however, legislation and policy supporting the preservation and use of TK in governance is recognized for its failures in implementation.⁵ Undaunted by the enduring struggle to maintain TK processes in the communities and regions, the TK Practitioners Group has been largely pre-occupied with the challenges of translating renewed understandings of traditional governance principles into decision making, policy, and programs.

The first meeting of the Practitioners Group in 2008 gave rise to a series of key messages and related narratives about Indigenous goals, principles, and modalities of governance. At the core of these messages was the concept that “everything is interconnected.” This concept underpins the traditional principles of respect and reciprocal obligation with the land, within the communities, and among the communities. Although such principles are considered to be quite normal in Indigenous communities, they are radical

3. The catalyst for the meeting was a discussion paper in traditional knowledge monitoring prepared for the NWT Cumulative Impact Monitoring Program (SENES Consultants, 2007).

4. Alestine Andre notes a number of examples of long term TK research in the Tłı̨chǫ, Sahtu, Gwich'in, Inuvialuit, Akaitcho Treaty 8, and Dehcho regions that highlight its many benefits. These projects involve research in narratives, place names, and language. As mentioned in the introduction to this article, discussion of the nature and role of TK research are not within the scope of this paper. The authors envision this as the focus of future work based on the *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop.

5. To address these failures, the NWT Department of Environment and Natural Resources tabled a TK Implementation Framework at the NWT Legislative Assembly on March 3, 2009. The two-page Framework document indicates that the government will promote and support “traditional knowledge initiatives,” but does not define what such initiatives would look like.

in the context of a governance system built to protect principles of productivity, competition, and private property. Governance founded in reciprocal obligation requires that leaders spend significant time learning from the land and listening to the people. Leadership is based on a person’s ability to harness the knowledge that comes from the land and the people to address changing circumstances. This is the essence of research-based governance.

The Practitioners Group considers governance within the communities and on the land to be both a goal and a principle inherent in TK processes. The consensus is that from a TK perspective, it is “our responsibility to keep the land alive.” The stories told by practitioners make it clear that keeping the land alive is the condition for the survival of Indigenous peoples. This is the reason that people are so concerned about recent news that the caribou herds are in rapid decline. A threat to the caribou herds marks a true crisis for Indigenous survival, identity, and well-being in the North. Members of the TK Practitioners Group have shared some of the stories about how relationships between people and caribou were first established “when the world was new,” what the protocols are for ensuring the continuity of these relationships, and what might be learned now about old and new approaches in caribou stewardship.

The second meeting of the Practitioners Group, held in March 2009, focused on exploring how TK processes could be strengthened in the current context. Key themes were the importance of maintaining these processes on the land, and the centrality of youth as the community members who must take ownership of TK and remake it to survive in the present and into the future. The group observed that communication lines with younger generations have been broken. There seemed to be no clear solutions for renewing the relationships with youth that would support their development as strong leaders accountable to their elders and through them their ancestors and their traditional territories. Nevertheless, it was agreed that much has been learned about the conditions for successful Indigenous research in the contemporary context, including the need for a strong vision from the elders, and an accountable process that includes planning, rigorous documentation and interpretation, analysis, verification, and effective ways of returning research to the community.

The NGPRC *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop in November 2009 was the third Practitioners Group event. Because it involved a much broader gathering of people from within and beyond the NWT, it allowed the group to assess their understanding of Indigenous research and governance

in relation to other experiences and stories, both through the format of the workshop and the concerns that were articulated. The enthusiasm of participants about their experience of the workshop shows the value of providing such forums for knowledge sharing in an Indigenous research context.

ENACTING INDIGENOUS RESEARCH: THE TALKING CIRCLE

As participants were gathering, facilitators Walter Bayha and Deborah McGregor sought assistance to reorganize the room in a talking circle format, derived from Indigenous collective knowledge sharing methods.⁶ This opened up a space where participants from diverse communities and experiences could feel at home, and thus could feel comfortable speaking. In the circle, participants introduced themselves and usually shared a brief story or spoke of profound experiences that for them shed light on the theme of Indigenous governance. They often referred with great respect to messages shared by others in the circle or at other conference sessions. The dialogic nature of peoples' contributions allowed for a rich process of synthesis and consensus-building as the circle progressed. Notwithstanding the limits of a meeting situated in an urban context and with few youth and elders present, the combined process of relationship building (through introductions), storytelling, and knowledge gathering around the circle was truly an enactment of "research the Indigenous way." In the talking circle, the facilitators were also "participants" in the process and shared knowledge and experiences with the circle participants. This process alleviated the power imbalances often found between researchers and the researched. The talking circle ensured that the contributions of all participants were equally recognized.

An agenda was circulated to the participants providing three key topics and questions to guide the circle, of which the third topic is the focus of this paper:

1. Traditional governance research: What do Indigenous governance systems look like? How have these systems been impacted by colonization? What is the vision for contemporary governance systems?
2. Working with current governance systems: How has traditional governance been addressed in current governance systems? What are the strengths and weaknesses in these systems?

6. As Lia Ruttan notes, "The use of sharing circles for a variety of purposes has been common in NWT for a lengthy period and most people are familiar with the process."

3. Futures for Indigenous Research/Indigenous Governance: What are the next steps for research to support strong Indigenous governance?

True to the spirit of the talking circle, the participants used narratives to deepen and expand upon the predetermined topics of inquiry, posing questions such as: What is Indigenous research? Who are Indigenous researchers? What do they do? Do we need Indigenous research to support Indigenous governance? If so, what does this type of research look like?

By permission of workshop participants, their narratives were audio-recorded and transcribed so as to provide a documented snapshot of the current “state of knowledge” on Indigenous research and governance, and a ground-truthing of perspectives discussed at the earlier TK Practitioners workshops. Participants were also informed that contributions from the workshop would be developed as part of the conference proceedings.

The stories and experiences shared by the participants seemed at times to be so diverse as to be unrelated. But careful listening (or reading of the transcripts) highlighted the common message that Indigenous governance research is not something that can be reduced to a static compilation of documented “traditional knowledge” compiled through social scientific procedures. Rather, it is the deliberate process of addressing questions and problems using Indigenous methods of learning the meaning of stories and renewing the stories through land-based practices that clearly reveal the nature of leadership and the basis for new decisions that need to be made⁷. Indigenous governance is not about “representation,” or decision-making by leaders “for” the people and the land based on objectified research. On the contrary, it is a form of highly accountable decision-making derived from the coming together of all the experiences and stories that people can bring to bear on issues of survival and well-being. Insofar as individual stories and experiences resonate with those of the ancestors, are derived from the land as a source of knowledge, and are pieces of a larger collective narrative, they are deeply spiritual. The talking circle was an enactment of both Indigenous research and Indigenous governance insofar as perspectives were being collectively forged. It was limited in being situated in an urban context and circumscribed in time. Given funding constraints and other practical challenges, these are perhaps necessary compromises required for at least some governance processes in the contemporary context, especially those that are cross-community and cross-regional.

7. This point was cogently made by Jackie Price in her NGPRC presentation on Inuit Governance.

NARRATIVES OF INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

The literature based on NWT research experiences, along with narratives shared in the talking circle at the NGPRC, indicate that the concept of Indigenous research has not gained common currency as it has in some circles elsewhere in Canada. However, in introducing the concept at the beginning of the talking circle, it is possible that Deborah McGregor and Walter Bayha provided a catalyst for a shift in thinking as the circle progressed. Walter set the stage using the example of Dene research methods for understanding caribou through stories based on relationships with caribou spanning countless generations:

You hear about all the studies we do on caribou today and there's many people that don't believe in these studies and how these studies are done. The Dene people have knowledge in stories. The Dene people have lived with caribou for 10,000 years. How do we learn about caribou? We observe them. The caribou is not going to sit there and say, well, this is the way I feel today. The Dene people have put it in stories. So the caribou stories, and especially you'll see a lot of stories about Raven, those are biology. The Dene people pass on stories by putting all this information in the stories they pass on. There's thousands of stories like that all across our continent here.

Barney Masuzumi reaffirmed the importance of Indigenous stories as a foundation of Indigenous research and the diverse disciplines of knowledge carried by various elders, depending on their particular experience and expertise. In an Indigenous research context, stories are deliberately and systematically used in problem-solving, by listening well and interpreting "hints and clues." The stakes are high for being able to draw upon the knowledge of the elders; it's often a matter of survival.

We have different grandfathers, and that's true, for different spheres of knowledge. I relied on the old stories to pull me through. There's examples of how to react to a really extreme situation. The old stories have got hints and clues. If you don't listen to them you won't survive."

Alestine Andre was most eloquent in talking about the role of stories in governing people's individual life paths, their relationships with each other, and their relationships with the land. In her view, the stories in themselves are governance; in an Indigenous context it is not necessary to distil these into abstract policy statements. Rather, the laws embedded within the stories can be directly interpreted and reinforced in the daily practice of each individual.

The stories, they are just priceless. They are about life on the land. They're about our ancestors. They're about the names of places on the land. Those are the things that make us who we are as a people and therefore is our governance ...Everything in our stories, everything in the way that we are, might not be written down in such straightforward patterns, guidelines and policies. But some of those rules are fairly rigid and implanted in us so that we carry them around with us.

The role of leaders is limited in a regime where the lessons in the stories remain open for individual interpretation, where each individual is self-governing. In Alestine's words, “We are our own set of governance. Each of us as individuals knows exactly where we fit into the whole pattern of our own governance.”

Whereas much TK research involving oral narratives is conducted according to conventional social science methods (semi-structured interviews and focus groups), Indigenous research is much more strongly rooted in traditional forums for sharing stories and experiences. Jonas Antoine stressed the importance of culturally appropriate practices for working with elders in the community. Rather than coming armed with questions, tape recorders, timelines and impatience, it is important to adapt to the pace of a visit, share food, and learn the stories by experiencing the relationships with the land.

The experience of being on the land with family and learning about one's responsibilities is central to Indigenous ways of knowing. This is why so often Indigenous people call for governance activities to take place on the land. As Jessica Simpson related, “People want decisions to be made on the land. Not necessarily in our offices or in meetings or anything like that, but doing things, doing activities on the land and coming to conclusions there because often times the outcomes are quite a bit different.” The lessons, rules and natural laws we learn from being on the land are invaluable. This type of embodied research becomes extremely important for research on governance. Alestine Andre spoke of living on the land and learning valuable lessons about “how we conduct ourselves” and “how we treat the land we depend on to survive.” Alestine related the one of the lessons learned in resource stewardship from her experience harvesting Labrador tea:

We were out picking blueberries and instead of picking blueberries I went to pick up Labrador tea. ... My mother came up and said, look, you better be careful. Don't pick it all. You're going to want some next year. From that time on to this day I've been very careful with my harvesting and collecting. So I think

that was a good lesson in resource management in the truest form of the way that we conduct ourselves, like if we talk about governance. So I think that is a very important rule that stays with me to this day. And it not only applies to Labrador tea, it applies to other resources, be it caribou or moose or anything on the land. Only take what you need.

The meaning of an elder's stories is not always immediately apparent, no matter how carefully the researcher listens. Often the meanings are only accessible as the researcher gains the experience necessary to understand them. Walter Bayha illustrated this point with a story about how his grandfather explained the meaning of what it is to be a true human being and a true Dene. His grandfather talked about someone who was always in jail, and said, "He's not a Dene, that's why he's doing that." Walter's response, just coming out of high school, was incomprehension. It was not until years later that the story took hold in his mind.

I forgot about it all these years and then eventually I started thinking about it. It started bugging me a little bit. What exactly was he talking about? Why did he say he's not a Dene? And why is it bothering me? I realized that I didn't ask the right question. I didn't ask a Dene question, the way a Dene would ask the question. It's not exactly a question. I would have said, Grandfather, what is a Dene? Who is a Dene? Then it started to make sense. All the things that I learned over the years when I was with him with all his prayers and all the things that I did with him trapping and hunting were about being Dene. I said, "Okay, a Dene to my grandfather is a person that tries to be a true human being by balancing the universe with himself and the Creator. The more he keeps things in balance, the truer he is as a human being.

Walter's experience demonstrates that to really understand Indigenous knowledge, values and perspective it is necessary to have an Indigenous mindset, learning to ask the right questions and coming to self-understanding in the process.

Jessica Simpson captured her experience in research with elders with the observation that "a lot of our elders are actually academics. When I go to scoping sessions and listen to them they have so much to say. They talk a lot about their experiences with the land." Jessica went on to acknowledge the difficulties of participating in Indigenous research in a cross-cultural context: "As somebody who doesn't speak my language I think I'm missing a lot of it because a lot of the knowledge is actually tied to their language." This difficulty for those schooled in scientific research and in non-Indigenous concepts and modes of thinking is important to recognize, since it poses a challenge to those who wish to make an easy correlation between natural

sciences and Indigenous research. Lia Ruttan pointed to the contested nature of stories in current governance contexts: “I learned that the truth was in the stories and that sometimes the nature of truth is contested between western researchers and Indigenous researchers. But if you listen to the stories the truth is there.”

It becomes necessary to communicate in English both in cross-cultural forums like the NGPRC, and within the communities as Indigenous language use declines. Indigenous languages are considered to be an important vehicle for Indigenous research, and a means of renewing relationships with and knowledge about the land. Nevertheless, workshop participants were strong in the belief that Indigenous research must involve working with Indigenous language and interpreting the meaning of Indigenous terms, placenames and concepts. In the words of Jonas Antoine, “Language is really, really important. That is when you start thinking in Dene. You don’t think in English anymore. You just start thinking in Dene. You start dreaming in Dene. That tells you something. It’s a spiritual thing that happens to you.”

Many of the talking circle participants spoke about the experience of leaving their communities for residential school, for work, or to make a home elsewhere and how that impacts current community well-being and governance. But they also talked with great feeling about their ties with their identity and their homeland, and their need to continually return home. Jonas Antoine, who lived for many years in the United States, talked about this experience.

I returned to the land and started talking about the land because one day, one of my people came up to me because I was going someplace for a conference. He says to me, “Who talks for the land? Who talks for the water and the animals?” I started thinking, “Boy. This is what it’s all about.”

At times this returning home is experienced in a sensation of resonance with a past experience, as when Jonas thought about moose hunting as he left a city night club, or when Barney Masuzumi applied K’asho Got’ine skills to survival on the land in Inuvialuit territory. This dispersal and returning by a diversity of paths continues to be experienced by new generations. Parents and elders feel their responsibilities to these youth acutely. In the words of Josephine Mackenzie,

My whole goal and one of the things that I taught my kids was the importance of coming back. Go to school, come back, work here. Bring that knowledge back

because we need you here..... As a parent I think that's part of governing your kids, governing the generations to come. The importance of passing on knowledge that's going to better the next generation.

Contemporary Indigenous research is driven by a dual desire to redeem knowledge that has been lost and to affirm knowledge that is still present. Young Jessica Simpson, who acknowledged that she may be missing out because she doesn't speak her Tłı̄chǫ language, works to approximate an Indigenous knowledge process through the traditional discipline of listening: "I think it's important that we all put our Dene ears on." The listening may take place in a broad-based forum like the NGPRC, but most importantly it must happen at home. Indigenous people need to be rooted in the stories and practices of their people and their homeland so that they can speak knowledgeably and govern themselves well. Celine Mackenzie Vukson, a student at Trent University originally from Behchokǭ in Tłı̄chǫ territory, cogently described the importance of returning home to her understanding of research. The deliberate effort to learn about one's heritage necessitates systematic efforts in research:

I thought I must do something to hang on to my language. I must come home. And in my studies I have found one of the most enduring themes of Indigenous studies for Indigenous people all over the world is the idea of coming home. The idea of relearning your language and your people and your land and all that goes with it.

Each community will find its own way to governance. This message was conveyed in the talking circle through a variety of stories about how people learned from their own elders. The diversity in governance processes that results from research rooted in homeland was most clearly conveyed in the example of parka making practices described by Inuit participant Jackie Price: "You could give five women exactly the same material and they would all make different parkas." Jackie argued that the diversity in stories, cultures and relationships with the land should be regarded as strengths. Externally imposed homogenizing governance processes are designed to be recognizable and accountable to the colonial state, rather than to the people on the land: "Sometimes I feel it's like we all have to wear the same parka. Which is too bad because we have really nice parkas and the more different the better because that's just the way it is. I think this respect for diversity is really inherent in Inuit methodology, how Inuit lived."

While returning is a critical aspect of contemporary Indigenous research, it is not always possible to stay at home. Some research must ne-

cessarily take place far away through processes of remembering. As Celine Mackenzie Vukson put it, “When I’m working in my home I remember those stories, and I have many stories.” This aspect of Indigenous research is not new for northern Indigenous people, who were often nomadic, following wildlife in the annual harvesting cycle, often settling in new territories to seek relationships outside the community or in response to changing wildlife populations, or later travelling great distances to transport furs to market (Abel 1993). Such travelling required, and continues to require, that people were always able to apply and develop their knowledge in changing and unforeseen circumstances.

ENACTING RESEARCH THE INDIGENOUS WAY

The NGPRC conference prepared a report comprised of a number of recommendations that set out a northern research agenda, several of which have already been referred to in this paper. Some of the recommendations from the conference overall were also echoed by workshop participants, in particular calls for “Improving Research Methodologies” and “Promoting Community-Based Research Protocols” (NGPRC, 2009). Although such recommendations are a step in the right direction toward improving the current research paradigm for “Indigenous research” in the north, they fall short in failing to explicitly recognize that Indigenous peoples have their own research methodologies. There are systemic challenges for enacting Indigenous research paradigms as articulated by NGPRC participants, especially in relation to research funding support. *Research the Indigenous Way* participants offered far more fundamental challenges by questioning what is considered “research” and who is considered a researcher.

One of the defining characteristics of Indigenous research as articulated by *Research the Indigenous Way* participants is its continuity over time. The methods remain as valid today as they did a thousand years ago. Application of this research meant that people could survive on the land and support their families and communities. This research methodology did not require funding from granting agencies or need approval from people geographically located far away. The challenge is for northern Indigenous research to find expression in the context of contemporary interactions in the northern land claims and self government.

This model for Indigenous research in the north can have application at a number of scales. The work of the TK Practitioners Group and the *Research the Indigenous Way* participants points to the need for large scale research on

governance. However, one of the intriguing characteristics of the Indigenous research as articulated in this paper is that the methods also apply at the local level. Participants in the *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop affirmed that Indigenous research is occurring on the ground, but is often not recognized as such. Indigenous research occurred in the past and has persisted as people continue to enact governance in families, on the land and in the communities. The challenge is not so much in the continued enactment of Indigenous research, but rather in understanding how can it be recognized and respected as a credible and necessary pre-requisite for Indigenous governance and self determination in the north. Such research is arguably most effective at the local scale, as this does not necessarily require funding from external agencies.

CONCLUSION

The role of Indigenous knowledge in governance has been formally recognized by the Government of the NWT over nearly two decades. Yet the oft-repeated refrain at the three TK Practitioners workshops since 2008 has been “they’re not listening.” Practitioners feel that the people’s voices are not being heard and accounted for in meaningful ways. Conversely, they recognize that there is often a deep suspicion of “research” in communities that might be a vehicle for such voices, usually because it has been experienced as form of mining where knowledge is paid for and taken elsewhere (who knows where?) by outsiders affiliated with external institutions. Even newer, more accountable research approaches are obliged to fulfil objectives and “deliverables” defined in offices and meeting rooms geographically and culturally far away from the communities that are the targeted Indigenous beneficiaries, whether they be in Yellowknife or Ottawa.⁸ Often this disjuncture between community interests and the research agendas offered to them is despite the best intentions of program developers.

It is possible that the lack of recognition of what Indigenous communities consider to be research (though they may not always use the term except for funding purposes) is the outcome of a policy framework that effectively detaches Indigenous knowledge from the processes and people that are its source. The *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop marks a watershed in creating space for collective validation of Indigenous research methodologies as distinct from (but not exclusive of) TK and participatory methodologies.

8. A problem addressed by the NGPRC recommendation for a “Northern Funding Foundation” (2009, 1).

The concept of Indigenous methodologies places in question the common commodification of “Elders,” the assumption that their knowledge can be easily mined and incorporated directly into non-Indigenous knowledge systems. True purposeful Indigenous research in the colonial context must be conducted by Indigenous researchers, who bear unique skills for working in the negotiated space that bridges into and from scientific and bureaucratic ways of knowing. Arguably, few if any non-Indigenous researchers are able to achieve this level of sophistication in the marshalling of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary tools. Like non-Indigenous communities, Indigenous peoples require their own researchers with extensive training and recognition within their discipline to assist them in the search for new knowledge to address new and ongoing problems and questions. Certainly there is a role for supportive and knowledgeable non-Indigenous researchers, but in the context of Indigenous research these would be considered “resource people” whose imported research interests and methods are supplementary to the core questions and approach.

The narratives shared at the *Research the Indigenous Way* workshop add nuance and life to NGPRC recommendations about the role of elders and Indigenous research experts in governance research, and the importance of honouring “local knowledge and customs.” Indigenous methodologies go further to place in question the validity of common assumptions about the value of scientific methods in Indigenous communities and in TK processes. Much remains to be done to develop the conception of Indigenous methodologies based on actual experiences of Indigenous research (whether or not it is conceived as such), and following from further dialogue among Indigenous researchers.

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