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**TEACHINGS FROM CREE ELDERS: A GROUNDED THEORY
STUDY OF INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP**

by

Leona Makokis

**A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education**

University of San Diego

2001

Dissertation Committee

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ABSTRACT

Teachings From Cree Elders: A Grounded Theory **Study of Indigenous Leadership**

For the past two hundred and fifty years, the relationship between First Nations and Euro-Canadians has shifted from an equal partnership to one of colonized and colonizer. Despite this history, First Nations people have shown resiliency, continuing to honor beliefs, values, and traditions. Constrained by Euro-Canadian government Indian Affairs policies, First Nations have not progressed economically or politically, but have been caught in the trap of administering their own poverty. The First Nations people are dying a slow death; thus, it is critical to examine their current reality, acknowledging that history does not begin with the arrival of the Europeans, but that the beliefs, values, and philosophies of the First Nations are embedded in their culture.

Using a grounded theory approach, this study attempted to answer two questions: What are the core values and beliefs of the Cree people? And, how can these beliefs be used to reshape the Cree self-governance systems? To address these questions multiple, in-depth, and focus group interviews were held with seven First Nations members, all of whom speak Cree and are leaders from the Saddle Lake First Nations reserve.

This study captured the stories of the Cree elders which included the gift of spirit and responsibility to the land that is embedded in the Cree language and the traditional knowledge that guides daily lives which dwells in the ceremonies. The voices of the participants explained that the imposition of the European systems of individualism, accumulation, and capitalism have contributed to the methodical and deliberate destruction of the core values and beliefs of the First Nations culture. Participants provided personal experiences of the colonial policies which have left them and their communities in the oppressed and dependent state they find themselves. However, the reawakening of First Nations ceremonies is one example of a resurgent force that is playing a central role in reclaiming the Cree gift and responsibility as First Nations people.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is in memory of my late mother, Alice C. Makokis (nee Pasquayak) and my late father, Vernon G. Makokis, who modeled leadership and guided me to continue the work they started. I give great thanks to both my parents for being a part of the collective movement that blazed the trail thirty years ago for First Nations to take local control of their children's education in Canada. Their vision has provided us, the First Nations people, with the opportunity to return to our First Nations teachings that our *nistameymakanak* (forefathers) left, so that our grandchildren will remember. To my son, Myles, daughter, Jodi Lee, and grand daughter, Skylar Singer Dion, I pray you will honor the legacy of your grandparents and great grandparents. I give thanks to all (*kahkiyaw kinanaskomitinawaw*).

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First and foremost I acknowledge Our Creator, Our Grandmothers, and Our Grandfathers who guided and provided me with the determination to complete this study.

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I am happy to acknowledge the penetrating insights and invaluable suggestions of my committee members, Dr. Paula Cordeiro (Chairperson), Dr. Ray Latta, and Dr. Johanna Hunsaker.

For generously supporting me in my research, I thank the Chief and Council of Kehewin Cree Nation, the Board of Governors, staff and students of Blue Quills First Nations College, and the staff of Tribal Chiefs Institute.

This dissertation was guided by the Natural Law of our Cree people, the values of love, sharing, honesty, and determination — values that were actively demonstrated by the participants and colleagues who assisted me throughout the process. I could not have done justice to this dissertation had I tried to singlehandedly challenge this huge task. I acknowledge Charlotte Kishaynew, Erica Makokis, and Marilyn Makokis for assisting me in some of the transcription and typing. Thank you Emily Hunter, Denise Steinhauer, and Steve Andreas for assisting in the Cree translations; Sherri Chisan for all the graphic designs, Dwayne Goodstriker for capturing the traditional open organizational structure in graphic design, and Dave Courchene, Jr. for allowing me to share the oral traditional story in written form; William Aguiar and John Berg for your editing, and Margot Berg for your typesetting. I would like to thank the following for reading my dissertation and providing me feedback and guiding me to other literary resources: Dr. Meinrad Banda, Scott MacDougall, and Dr. Patricia Makokis. Without the help of my colleagues, this journey would have been a lonely one and almost impossible. I would like to thank the following people for sharing their gifts and abilities to ensure that this dissertation was completed and truly reflected the beliefs, values, and philosophy of our Cree people: Thank you to my colleagues Diana Steinhauer and Stewart Steinhauer for giving up your family time to spend many weekends with me as we reviewed the document, had in-depth discussions, and finally made the changes. Part of my academic and personal growth was in part from all the discussions we had. I will always remember our discussions, debates and the laughter we shared. I will be a better person for it.

Finally, I owe heartfelt thanks to my family, my son Myles and daughter Jodi Lee, for their unwavering love and support without which this dissertation would not have been written. To my five brothers and sisters-in-law and three sisters and brothers in law, I love you all. Thank you Eugene and Dr. Patricia, Bernie and Gloria, Eddie and Phyllis, Casey and Marie, Ricky and Joanne, Susan and Gus (Dion), Christine and Victor (Houle) and finally, Marilyn. I would like to also acknowledge all my nephews, nieces, and grandchildren. It was you I had in mind throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The roots of Canadian First Nations' problems lie deep in oppression and genocide sanctioned in the name of the true Christ and the blessings of European civilizations. First Nations are those people whose ancestors signed Treaties with the Crown of Great Britain, while others have signed Treaties more recently with the Government of Canada. With their arrival to the American lands, the Europeans brought with them their own values which often were in opposition to, and incongruent with, First Nations' beliefs, values, and traditions. The historian, Miller (1991), wrote, "the Europeans came from societies that were highly stratified, and their governments coercive in nature . . . they were also acquisitive economies" (p. ix). Most inconsistent with First Nations' values was the European belief in the right to a capitalistic economy and private ownership of land and resources. As noted by Berger (1991), the arrival of the Europeans in North America resulted in the displacement of First Nations people.

The colonial experience devastated the First Nations people. Speaking of the crimes committed by the early settlers against First Nations, Bellah (1992) said:

The failure to see the Indian in their own terms was only the cultural side of a denial of humanity that was also expressed in economic and even biological

terms. The Indians were deprived by the new settlers, not only of the inherent right to have one's culture understood and respected, but they were ruthlessly deprived of land and livelihood and all too often of life itself. (p. 37)

As part of the colonization of First Nations people, problems have arisen from the misunderstanding of the Treaties that were signed between the Crown of Great Britain and First Nations Leaders in the late 1800s. The understanding of First Nations people was that these Treaties were signed Nation-to-Nation. First Nations people also understood that reserve lands were set aside for them to practice their spiritual way of life and to provide protection from further encroachment by European settlers. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 identified the protocols of dealing with First Nations people and the rights of First Nations people to their lands and self-governance. However, the intent of Canada's legislation, as it relates to First Nations people, was to eliminate their presence.

In 1867 the British North America Act established the Dominion of Canada. In this Act, the Government of Canada through Section 91(24) retained the right to control First Nations and all lands reserved for them. This was done without consultation or consent from First Nations people. Once treaties were signed, the government of Canada legislated a comprehensive statute, the Indian Act, 1876, and subsequent amendments exercising control over all aspects of First Nations people. Through the process of time and the eventual colonial position over the First Nations, the Canadian government, utilizing the Indian Act, influenced the political systems experienced by First Nations today. For example, election procedures on all First Nations

communities have been legislated through the Indian Act. This Government system of control forced First Nations elected leaders to acceptance and maintenance of its programs, policies, and systems.

The 500 year colonial domination created European institutions which are presently utilized to neutralize First Nations people. These institutions continue to try to erode First Nations culture, as Berger (1991) wrote, “that since 1492 Native institutions, their life ways and their lands have been under attack by Europeans” (p. x). York (1992) concurred: “The reserve system was an effective tool for suppressing native aspirations in Canada. Ironically, however, the reserves have helped preserve native culture” (p. 266).

Senge (1990) highlighted how structures influence behavior. One must look beyond personalities and events to the political structures. He explained, “We must look into the underlying structures which shape individual actions and create the conditions where types of events become likely” (p. 43). Present First Nations leaders are bound by Government regulations, making them appear to be an administrative arm of the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC). In particular, the stifling nature of Indian and Northern Affairs’ bureaucratic systems constrains present day leaders and makes them seem lulled into passivity. By implementing Government systems, institutions, and policies, First Nations leaders involuntarily sustain the colonization process of Western Society.

The leaders’ concession to these policies then prohibits them from seeking the advocacy measures required to challenge government’s dictates. The present Canadian

government, founded on individualistic principles, creates and imposes policies supporting and arising from these implicit European values. The leaders and elders of First Nations communities find themselves in a constant dilemma regarding these colonial measures. They are faced with addressing the social issues of their communities, the lack of economic development, and a high unemployment rate. On the other hand, there is a consistent need to ensure that the Canadian government will not undermine the Treaties.

First Nations have not been able to move forward, economically or politically. As followers of Canadian federal policy on Indian Affairs, we are administering our own poverty, stripping away our people's integrity and quality of life. We are dying a slow death. I refer to First Nations in terms of "we" because I am a First Nations researcher, living and working in my First Nations community and, therefore, cannot differentiate myself from my people.

We presently live a dual reality: our beliefs and traditions from the Creator; and, alternately, living in a very dependent and powerless state. We have developed habits and patterns that reinforce our present situation. The roles that once had meaning in our society are not fulfilled. The children are vulnerable, as are the old, who are disassociated from meaningful involvement in the community; and the needs of disabled people are ignored. These are signs indicating we are not being responsible, as defined by ourselves. An Oglala Sioux spiritual interpreter and author, Floyd Looks for Buffalo Hand (1998), described what is taking place in the communities:

Children nowadays have no respect for their elders, and no respect for their mothers. And the children are being blamed for that. It is not so. It is the mother, father, the grandmother, and the grandfather — they are to pass down this teaching — the respect. . . . Know your responsibilities. The supreme law of the house is the woman, the mother, the grandmother, the daughter. The man's authority is to protect, to feed and give good teachings. The mother tells the family what to do; the father is responsible for the teaching of the children. . . . Walk with humility. We must seek to humble ourselves at all times. We must always humble ourselves in front of our elders and people who are older than us. This way we seek humility every day, with respect. It is the attitude and example you set with humility in front of your children that they are going to become with compassion and love. (p. 70)

Prior to the arrival of Europeans, First Nations communities maintained their systems as described by Duran and Duran (1995):

Native Americans had a very well-structured society in which everyone's role and place was well defined. Our family systems and self-governance supported these roles and functions, and everyone felt valued as a member of the community. (p. 44)

We must critically examine our current reality and envision what our reserves will look like if everybody carries out his/her responsibilities. In addition, we must acknowledge that our history does not begin with the arrival of the Europeans, but rather that our beliefs, values, and philosophies are embedded in our own historical stories, our

own languages, and in our own ceremonial settings. For millennia prior to European arrival, First Nations people lived and thrived on the huge land mass we refer to as Turtle Island. We existed as sovereign, self-governing Nations long before the establishment of the Government of Canada.

The systems of First Nations people, based on collectives, participatory democracy, cooperation, and kinship, are grounded in a philosophy shaped from the spirit of the land, and a belief that the environment, cosmos, plant, animal, and human realms are all equal and interconnected. Community elders advise that this is the foundation of knowledge that First Nations leaders must rely on to make effective changes in our institutions, reflecting our own value systems, rather than adopting those conflicting values imposed by European institutions.

Background of the Problem

First Nations people lived as sovereign Nations prior to European colonialists establishing the Canadian Government. The history of First Nations people has two phases. Kellough (1980) identified the first phase: “The early historical period was characterized by a high level of autonomy in which Indians held the initiative for social, political, and economic aspects of their life.” In the second phase “they lost their autonomy and took on the characteristics of a colonized people” (p. 343).

The continued fight by First Nations leaders is grounded in our understanding of the Treaties signed by two sovereign nations. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 was the first acknowledgment by the British Crown of the sovereignty of First Nations. Our understanding of their Royal Proclamation was that they were creating a “legal”

process for future monopoly of land acquisition by the British Crown. It established the protocol in dealing with First Nations, retaining for the Crown the sole right to negotiate Treaty agreements. There was a sharp contrast of understanding between the Treaty Commissioners and the First Nations. Linda R. Bull (1991), a Cree First Nations member, emphasized that,

If Indian tribes had been weak culturally and spiritually, they would have been assimilated at a faster rate. Instead, traditional Indian people persevered and carried on and maintained the customs and traditions that have been a part of them since time immemorial. (p. 56)

To overcome the autonomy of First Nations, in 1876 the Canadian Legislature created the Indian Act without the input of Indian people. Frideres (1997) added, "The Indian Act is the foremost of the legislative Acts that affect Indians in Canada. Its importance cannot be exaggerated nor can its influence be minimized" (p. 24). This Act, initially designed to eliminate First Nations people is now used for assimilation. In spite of the neutralizing policies of the Federal Government, many First Nations people still practice their cultural values, beliefs, and traditions. It is of utmost importance that these cultural values be validated by using them as a foundation to everything First Nations challenge in the move toward *pahminsiwin*, a Cree word meaning self-governance.

The Problem

We, as First Nations communities, 125 years after signing a Treaty with the British Crown, have unconsciously adopted a "neo-colonial attitude," exhibiting

behaviors associated with the colonial presence. These behaviors, such as promotion of Euro-Canadian values and systems as being better than First Nations core values and systems, self and community directed anger, welfare dependency, and much more, are examples of the insidious effects of colonization. We now participate in operating the colonial system.

How do we, as First Nations communities, quicken the transition from a neo-colonial attitude to an attitude that meets the real needs of our communities — while faced with the present relationship with the Government.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to place in the foreground First Nations wisdom, that of grassroots people whose voice has been rendered silent, so that we may re-create healthy communities that are economically and politically strong. The goal is to reconnect to our lives as spiritual beings, descendants from the Creator as Nehiyawak, and forge a better future for the “seven generations unborn.” In so doing, it will address the requirements for renewal of First Nations leadership. Stefanos, in *Mentoring the Mentor* (Fraser, Macedo, McKinnon, & Stokes, 1997), stated:

The oppressed have to break the cycle themselves and achieve inner freedom, through social and cultural transformation. . . . During the long campaign for national liberation in Guinea Bissau, Cabral proclaimed that resistance is a cultural act, and that it must promote cultural change which enables the colonized people to “return to the source” to reassert their own history, and recapture their own identity. (p. 245)

Research Questions

This study examines the following research questions in order to better enable First Nations people to address the problem statement.

1. What are the Cree core values and beliefs?
2. How can these beliefs be used to change our neo-colonial attitudes and then assist us to reshape our self-governance systems?

In recognizing the delegitimizing influences of the European Society, the leadership can make alternative decisions based on this new knowledge. These questions were addressed through research conversations using a grounded theory model.

Methods

In order to address these research questions, this study used a grounded theory qualitative approach consisting of individual and group interviews. This research method provided an opportunity for theory to evolve as First Nations themselves voiced their experiences and their understanding of their core Cree values and beliefs, their colonial experience and, finally, their visions for a better future. The grounded theory method looks for data, rather than look at data, thus leading to an emerging theory. This research design was appropriate in that it gave voice to a people who have been silenced.

Assumptions of the Study

I assumed that because I am an authentic researcher (Swisher, 1986), a First Nations community member and Cree speaker, the grassroots people, elders, and elected leadership would be receptive, participate, and validate the research.

Further, I assumed that the utilization of Western institutions to colonize all First Nations members in Canada has had the same results in all First Nations communities. I believed that if this study were done on any of the reserves across Canada, the impacts of colonialism would be similar, as would the problems faced by all First Nations in Canada from the imposition of government policies.

Delimitations of the Study

This study was delimited to First Nations members of northeast Alberta who were born on Saddle Lake Cree First Nations reserve. The Saddle Lake First Nation reserve has a population of 6,500 people. There are 44 First Nations communities in Alberta. This community was chosen because of the variety, diverse leadership, and administrative experiences of its members; the local and administrative control of their programs from 1967; the range of formal and informal education backgrounds of their members; and the strong cultural and language practices of the members. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized beyond members of this Cree reserve.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One contains the background of the problem, the problem, and the purpose of the study, which includes the research questions, methods, assumptions, and delimitations of the study.

The second chapter reviews the literature, which includes the European laws and institutions, First Nations-Euro-Canadian relations (the colonial process) and, finally, the revitalization and resurgence in First Nations Communities. This chapter includes oral traditional knowledge.

The third chapter includes the methodological overview, research design, data collection, approach to data analysis, and summary. The grounded theory approach was the qualitative research method used to give voice to a people who have been silenced. This research method presented opportunities for First Nations participants to provide their understanding of their core Cree values and beliefs.

The fourth chapter presents the findings of the study, which provides the Cree world view, the colonial effects on First Nations and, finally, the community development process.

The final chapter includes the summary, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Through historical development, the relationship of Europeans and First Nations people changed from that of equal partnership to one of control and eventual colonization of First Nations, resulting in their oppressed and powerless state. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) reported that unemployment and dependency on welfare are high and likely to get higher, and that rising investment in social assistance, while necessary to provide minimal income flow, is not an adequate response to the situation. They show that 43 % of First Nations living on reserve depended on social assistance in 1992, as compared to 8.1 % of the general Canadian population. In regards to reserve housing, it reports that families double and triple-up, with 18-20 people living in a unit built for one family.

The Euro-Canadian governments' utilization of their governing systems, churches, education, laws, and economic power, managed to suppress First Nations and their homelands, while the Euro-Canadian benefitted from the resources of the land. The signing of the Treaties and the enforcement of a federal legislative tool, the Indian Act, provided reason for the Canadian government to herd First Nations onto reserve lands chosen for them by the government. In addition, the government removed the

First Nations children from their communities and placed them in residential schools to ensure their assimilation into Canadian society. York (1992) wrote that Indian residential schools, operated by Catholic and Protestant missionaries, were a dominant institution in controlling First Nations people across Canada from 1887 until 1969. He added: "The government, like the churches, believed the Indian culture was 'barbaric' and 'savage.' The Federal authorities were determined to transform the Indian children into faithful Christians who would abandon their traditional native spiritual beliefs" (p. 22).

The results have been the devastation of proud Nations; but, through the determination and direction of the elders, First Nations people have continued to struggle to maintain languages, values, beliefs, and philosophies. The importance of reviving the language is key to understanding the philosophy of First Nations. Their world view is embedded in their language as well as their responsibilities to each other, the land, cosmos, and plant and animal kingdom. Within the language, their roles and relationships are established. Most importantly, the language is spiritually based.

In order for First Nations people to take control of their own lives and be self-governing, they need to understand the colonization process. They also need to return to their own knowledge and validate its importance as they begin to develop their own education, economic, and political systems based on this information. Harold Cardinal (1977), former President of the Indian Association of Alberta, stated that it will be a mistake to look too much on the white man to provide models for our political and organizational structures:

To find the models we need, the first place we have to look is within ourselves.

We have to go back to our elders and examine the institutions that they set up over the centuries, to provide a general framework upon which we can build our own modern process of setting up organizations and bodies that will represent our interest; in short, a modern process of government. (p. 29)

This chapter is organized into three sections. First, European and Canadian laws and policies are discussed. The next section discusses First Nations and European relations. The final section describes the revitalization and resurgence of First Nations communities.

European and Canadian Laws and Policies

Institutions have been created to reflect the beliefs and values of a society.

When the Europeans arrived in the Americas, they had already established themselves as a structured, highly stratified society, coercive in nature. They were also acquisitive economies (Miller, 1989). Most inconsistent with European values, when considered from a First Nations perspective, was the belief in the right to a capitalistic economy and private ownership of land and resources. This belief is supported by the Lockean (Lock, 1986) philosophy of individualism, where individuals have the right to take others' property for their own person by virtue of their own labor on that property.

Upon entering the Americas they began to apply their acquisitive structures to establish their ownership. The dilemma in which the Europeans found themselves was that there were already First Nations people living on these lands. McNickle (1973) identifies two practical problems they had to solve:

First, they must occupy the land and defend their occupations against indigenous tribes and other European powers. In the second place, they found it prudent to devise procedures by which title to the land could pass in an orderly manner from Indians to Europeans (p. 26).

The first official document used to make legal claim to First Nations land was the Royal Proclamation of 1763, on which the numbered treaties (1860-1923) are founded. Following it came the British North America Act of 1867, which established the Dominion of Canada; the Indian Act of 1876, a government legislative and administrative tool; and finally, the White Paper of 1969, an assimilation policy. All of these European and Canadian legislative tools were intended to initially annihilate, and eventually to assimilate, the rest of the First Nations people so there would not be an "Indian problem" and the lands and resources could be dispersed among the Euro-Canadians.

Throughout the history of the European and First Nations contact, these views of assimilation, civilization, and genocide have been supported and reinforced by European institutions. Social attitudes and government policies that aimed at assimilating native people have left them dispossessed of their culture, their language, their children, and their power of self-determination (York, 1992).

Royal Proclamation (1763)

Prior to the issuance of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 by King George III, France and Britain were competing to claim lands in the North American continent. Lands were claimed utilizing the following means: conquest by war, right of discovery

and the doctrine of terra nullius (meaning unoccupied and uninhabited lands). Hence, lands in the newly discovered Americas were claimed by the tradition of raising their national flag and claiming jurisdiction. The newly established United States of America which gained independence from Britain in 1776, meant that Britain had to compete with American nationalism in its westward movement. Additionally, north of the established border between Upper Canada and the United States, the French ceded New France to the English under the Treaty of Paris (1763). This treaty was negotiated in the articles of Capitulation of Quebec signed between England and France pledging that: (a) the French language and culture would be protected, (b) they would have the right to practice their Roman Catholic religion, and (c) their Indian Allies would be protected, inclusive of their land rights (Wright, 1993). The British were aware of the situation of the European settlers coming and squatting on lands to which they did not have any legal authority. The British were caught between two legal traditions: common law dictated that the Indians owned the land and their practice under common law was to purchase the land from its owners. Secondly, the British had a tradition of claiming by proclamation or statute, unoccupied lands in the name of the Crown.

In order to address these pressing issues, a basic principle of English legal tradition applied to British colonies was enforced. The 1763 Royal Proclamation was the first official document to affirm sovereignty of First Nations as recognized by the British Crown (Asch, 1984; McNickle, 1973; Titley, 1988). Brizinski (1993) stated, "Although colonists initially treated the Americas as 'uninhabited,' the British believed

that the lands were Indian lands unless they were 'bought' for some sum, however large or small" (p. 150).

The Royal Proclamation had several important features. It recognized Indian title to lands, the right to self-governance on those lands, and it specified the procedures by which the British government could negotiate treaties. The Proclamation used the term "Nations or Tribes of Indians," and this indicates that the British recognized the existence of Indian nations as sovereign states (Brizinski, 1993). The British Royal Proclamation benefitted the First Nations because it provides one of the strongest guarantees of Aboriginal land rights.

Numbered Treaties (1860-1923)

The Royal Proclamation established the protocol in negotiating Treaties between the British Crown and First Nations. The process of treaty signing was driven by the government; they set the stage by promoting the destruction of the First Nations economy by decimating the buffalo herds, intentionally introducing sickness by passing diseased blankets, and by using alcohol as a primary trading tool (Dickason, 1997). As a result, First Nations were in a very vulnerable state. Christian missionaries, who had been working hard for decades to insinuate themselves and Christian doctrines into First Nations communities, became key players in the Treaty-making process. In order to pursue their national agenda the Canadian government needed to conclude treaties with First Nations peoples occupying the desired territories. Moreover, in 1870, the Canadian government paid 300,000 pounds for the so-called interests of the Hudson's

Bay Company which claimed ownership to Ruperts Land (Dickason, 1997). The significance of the Treaties is that they opened up the west for the government.

The British Crown had the advantage of controlling the process, setting the agenda, establishing meeting times, dates and places, and defining the terms. Treaty texts were written by the Government and simply presented to First Nations for signing. Moreover, there is evidence that, in many cases, hard-won oral promises made by the Treaty commissioners have never been recognized or acted upon by the Government (Friederes, 1997).

The signed Treaty texts read that First Nations agreed to “cede, release, surrender, and yield up” land in exchange for reserves, small cash payments, ammunition, uniforms and medals for the Chiefs, annual payments for each First Nation member, and the right to fishing, hunting, and gathering activities. It is useful to note that in the Cree language, there is no such concept as selling, surrendering, or giving up land. Therefore, even though the Treaty text presents the government view, First Nations people are responsible for introducing most of the important treaty terms (Taylor, as cited in Price, 1979). For example, the provision for education is clearly stated even though the wording may vary slightly in each of the 11 treaties signed from 1850-1921. Treaty number six includes a medicine chest clause and a pestilence and famine clause.

However, First Nations of Canada were never conquered; instead, they signed Treaties with the Europeans, believing they had a nation-to-nation relationship. Nevertheless, First Nations people were herded on to small tracts of land called reserves. Since then, they have been treated as children, with the Canadian government behaving

like a parent. With this kind of relationship there can never be a partnership. Ovide Mercredi (Mercredi & Turpel, 1993), the former President of the Assembly of First Nations, stated: "We are the only peoples in Canada who are consistently treated paternalistically and in a condescending manner by governments and the bureaucracies of government" (p. 136).

British North America Act (1867)

Subsequent acts of parliament, including the 1867 British North American Act, which established the Dominion of Canada, annotate clauses which affect Indians and lands reserved for Indians in Section 91 (24). Alan Pratt (as cited in Hawkes, 1991), explains in the book *Aboriginal Peoples and Government Responsibility*:

The Government of Canada believed that s.91(24) provided Parliament with exclusive jurisdiction to enact laws and play an administrative role relating to "Indians" as well as to "Lands reserved for Indians." Initially, this means that the Government of Canada acquired those obligations formerly accruing to the colonial governments under pre-Confederation treaties, along with the responsibility for all existing Indian reserves whether created by the Crown or otherwise. (p. 64)

The federal government gave themselves the primary responsibility for First Nations, which included education in Canada; whereas education for all other Canadians is a responsibility assumed by each province. However, J. L. Tobias (as cited in Miller, 1991) said the legislation by which the governments of Canada sought to fulfill their responsibilities always had as its ultimate purpose the elimination of the First

Nation's special status. The Constitution Act, 1982, entrenched existing aboriginal rights in the Canadian Constitution and offers protection of these rights (Mallea, 1994).

Indian Act (1876)

The Indian Act is a quagmire for Canada; it is the foremost legislative Act that affects First Nations across Canada. Its importance cannot be exaggerated nor can its influence be minimized. It is the principle instrument by which the federal Government and, indirectly, the provincial governments, have exercised control over the lives of First Nations people (Frideres, 1997). It has been condemned as racist and colonial and held out in the international community as a huge blight on Canada's human rights record. The legacy is significant because the Act is almost as old as Canada itself. It has origins in colonial and Canadian law and has been revised many times, most significantly in 1951, and 1985 (Mercredi & Turpel, 1993).

The 1976 Indian Act (and subsequent amendments) is a comprehensive statute dealing with all aspects of First Nations people. The Indian Chiefs of Alberta (1970) in *Citizens Plus* stated:

The Indian Act provides for the basis for the Indian Affairs Branch. It confers on the Minister very sweeping powers. It often frustrates Indians in their individual efforts to earn a living and the entire tribe in its attempts toward greater self-government and better stewardship of the assets of the tribe. (p. 12)

An example of the Minister's powers, the Chiefs provide the following:

. . . The Minister may. . . authorize use of lands for schools or burial grounds
. . . authorize surveys and subdivisions . . . determine and direct the

construction of roads. . . issue certificates of possession . . . direct an Indian person or the tribe to compensate another Indian . . . call a referendum . . . appoint executors of wills . . . Declare the will of an Indian to be void . . . issue temporary permits for the taking of sand, gravel, clay and other non-metallic substances upon or under lands in a reserve . . . make expenditures out of the revenues of the tribe to assist sick, aged, or destitute Indians of the tribe and provide for the burial of deceased indigent members . . . etc. etc. etc. All these things, and many more, the Minister may do without consulting anyone. Such oppressive powers are probably without equal in the post-colonial era. (p. 13).

Mercredi and Turpel's (1993) view was that the Treaties are not responsible for our problems today. They have not converted our people into inferior human beings. The relationship of dominance we have experienced is a product of government policies like the Indian Act, not a product of the treaties.

The Indian Act was administered in the interest of benign rule, but its implementation created isolation, control, and enforced poverty. According to Frideres (1997), it has become the most vicious mechanism of social control that exists in Canada today. On one hand, it has accorded Indians special status, legally and constitutionally; on the other, it has denied them equality in any realm of Canadian life (Berger, 1991).

Elimination, assimilation, and paternalism have been the foundation of Canadian First Nations policy. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the First Nations populations were on the decline. Government legislation and policies dictated

who could be classified as an Indian. (First Nations is a term used by First Nations to identify themselves instead of the misnomer Indian). In other cases, through the provision of enfranchisement, many First Nations people were never classified as such. There were indications that First Nations as First Nations would disappear. But this gradual assimilation contained in the Treaty provision was criticized by those who advocated a more rapid assimilation approach (Asch, 1984).

White Paper (1969)

With the support of Prime Minister Trudeau, the White Paper (1969) on Indian policy called for the repeal of the Indian Act and an end to federal treaty obligations. The White Paper would terminate the special status of First Nations people and force their assimilation into Canadian society. The White Paper proposed the following:

- That the legislative and constitutional bases of discrimination should be removed.
- That there should be a positive recognition by everyone of the unique contribution of Indian culture to Canadian life.
- That services should come through the same channels and from the same government agencies for all Canadians.
- That those who are furthest behind should be helped the most.
- That lawful obligations should be recognized.
- That control of Indian lands should be transferred to Indian people subject of Provincial laws (Indian Chiefs of Alberta, 1970, p. 4, p. 9).

The Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chretien, who authored the proposed White Paper, recognized that Canada was both legally and morally obligated to carry on the trust relationship with First Nations initiated by the British Crown. The White Paper was cleverly written to extinguish the special status retained by First Nations as a result of the Treaties. Further, the trust obligations are entrenched in the B.N.A. Act and Royal Proclamation.

The White Paper was an internal document that was leaked to the First Nations community in 1969. Dickason (1997) wrote about the response of the National Indian Brotherhood: "We view this as a policy designed to divest us of our aboriginal, residual, and statutory rights. If we accept this policy, and in the process lose our rights and our lands, we become willing partners in culture genocide. This we cannot do" (p. 364). Cardinal (1977) saw it as a disguised program of cultural extermination. Other leaders shared this view. Dickason (1997) quoted Dave Courchene, president of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood:

Once again the future of Indian people has been dealt with in a high-handed and arbitrary manner. We have not been consulted, we have been advised of decisions already taken. I feel like a man who has been told he must die and am now to be consulted on the methods of implementing that decision. (p. 364)

The Indian Association of Alberta issued a counter-proposal, *Citizens Plus* (1970), which became known as the Red Paper, thus asserting First Nation sovereignty and the treaty position. The Federal Liberal government was forced to abort this

comprehensive assimilation effort in March of 1971, and choose a piecemeal implementation process which continues today.

In summary, the rationale for the imposition of these foreign laws and policies on First Nations by the colonial government was to eliminate First Nations people and their claim to the land. However, it found itself legally and morally obligated to First Nations because of the Treaties signed by the British Crown.

Canada never defeated an Aboriginal Nation. It took over a policy of dealing with Indigenous populations from the British Crown, who had started in a position of needing Aboriginal help to hold whatever tenuous claim they had to North American territory, and ended up finding themselves legally and morally obligated to people they no longer wanted to deal with. Burdened with responsibilities they never accepted, Canada adopted the tactics of “ordinary” genocide; one of their “shock treatments” was Indian Residential School.

(Chrisjohn & Young, 1997, p. 46)

The position of First Nations people is that they have existed as sovereign, self-governing nations long before the establishment of the Government of Canada. Grounded in the fact that the First Nations people were in possession of the land before the arrival of the European newcomers, aboriginal rights existed. (Aboriginal rights differ from treaty rights in that they are not contained in a formal document.)

First Nations — European Canadian Relations

The colonizing of a people is a social process; in the case of Canadian Indians, this process had its roots in the earliest days of contact (Kellough, 1980). Kellough

stated that control of power is what distinguishes the colonized and the colonizer, and when this power shifted in favor of the Europeans, the actual colonial period began. She explains this policy has a structural level and a cultural level.

The structural level is concerned with the external factors giving the colonizer the power to determine the institutions of the colonized. This level is concerned with decision-making affecting institutions and living conditions, and began with the institution of reserves in the 1800s. The cultural level is the colonizer possessing the power to define the reality of the colonized. This level is concerned with the internal factors of colonization, which are cultural and psychological components.

Friesen (1997) outlined three views of Indian and non-Indian relations, from the first contact and throughout history, which have had a lasting impact on the First Nations:

The first view has been to attempt to integrate or assimilate the Indigenous peoples into the culture of the conquering peoples. This position was reinforced by a strong European sense of ethnocentrism that depicted First Nations cultures as inferior.

The second view of the incoming Europeans was to promote biracial, bicultural harmony between the races so that they and “civilized Indians” could live in peaceful existence. The difficulty of this approach was to justify the taking of Indian lands, even though it was argued that in the long run it was for the Indian’s own good.

The third view of Indian and non-Indian relations after contact was simply to segregate the Indians on reserved pieces of land so they would have minimal interaction and influence upon their non-Indian neighbors. Reserves were created primarily in order to render certain areas available for settlement by non-natives. Those who perpetuated this policy also believed that this was a convenient way to keep the Indians from having much to do with society while they quietly died out. (p. 219)

From the initial period of European contact there have been four sectors of Europeans that were actively involved with First Nations people: the fur traders, settlers, state, and finally, the missionaries. In each of these sectors the relationship with First Nations people changed from that of an equal partner to the present situation of dependence. Youngblood Henderson (2000) in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision* wrote that according to historian Lise Noel:

In systemic colonization, no single source of oppression or dominion can be assigned causal or moral primacy. Colonization theories are embedded in every consciousness and work as routine or normal activities. Instances of intolerance are so pervasive in modern society that scholars cannot individualize them. If the oppression cannot point to single causes or forms of oppression, then the oppressor and his consciousness become invisible. (pp. 29, 30)

Fur Traders

The initial contact of First Nations and Europeans was one of commercial partnership and mutual benefit, leading to an evolution of working relationships

between the two groups. Miller (1989) explained the reason for this type of relationship; the nature of relationships between two peoples of different backgrounds is largely determined by the reasons they have for interacting with each other. As long as the Europeans needed the skills and expertise of the First Nations people, they were able to live in equal partnership. At this point in history, First Nations people were portrayed as being active and assertive contributors to the unfolding of Canadian history. The early historical period was characterized by a high level of autonomy in which Indians held the initiative for the social, political, and economical aspects of their life (Kellough, 1980).

The fur trading itself began to impact the social and economic lives of First Nations people who were trading with the Europeans. As they got more involved, there was a dependence on the technology and the trading practices. As involvement increased they began to move westward, leaving a vacuum in what is known as Northern Ontario. This provided an opportunity for French competitors to quickly take advantage of this vacuum to build posts in these vacant areas (Driben & Trudeau, 1983).

Settlers

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the importance of the fur trade gave way to the era of the settler. The individualistic society of the Europeans, supported by their government, affirmed their right to take land without any consideration of the adverse impact on the First Nations people they displaced. Frideres (1997) wrote that the land base was unequally distributed; Euro-Canadians were given the most fertile

land, the government took the control of the water, which altered the environment to the disadvantage of the First Nations. Bellah (1992) recognized the influence of Lockean thought on the European settlers: "The European believed the individual's interest becomes prior to society and that all forms of individualism in America stresses the autonomy and dignity of the individual, leading to a competitive and individualistic society" (p. 143). First Nations were seen as a hindrance to western development because the settlers were not able to access the land without addressing the rightful ownership of the land. Also, Natives had become economically redundant over time because of changes in the structure and technology of the economy. After the buffalo hunts ended and the fur trade ceased, Natives were largely unable to participate in the economy (Frideres, 1997).

The conflicting values and philosophies of the First Nations and Europeans was quite evident. As the Europeans came to settle, they brought with them their own values which were often inconsistent with First Nations beliefs, values, and traditions. Most inconsistent was the right to capitalistic private ownership of land and resources. The significance of capitalism lay in its psychological character; these European people were not only interested in acquiring material goods, but needed to reinvest, so they could acquire more property (Miller, 1989).

In contrast, the concept of private ownership of land to First Nations was inconceivable. Oren Lyons (as cited in Littlebear, Boldt, & Long, 1985) interpreted the concept of owning land similar to one of owning air; nobody owns the air that we breathe. de Toqueville's (1990) observation of First Nations and their beliefs was that

land is the common property of the tribe and belongs to no one in particular, so that individual interests are not concerned in protecting any part of it.

The First Nations people had the belief that Mother Earth would provide for them in a reciprocal relationship. They would take only what they required for their survival. The European paradigm was that land could be bought and sold. In the initial proposal to purchase land, Europeans experienced First Nations determination that it could not be sold. This, of course, did not prevent the Europeans from advancing and squatting on lands, rationalizing their action based on the Lockean philosophy of private ownership of land for individual advantage and earned by their own hard labor (Lock, 1986). As Europeans settled and took over the land, de Toqueville (1990) observed its effects on First Nations people: "To drive away their [Indian] game has the same effect as to render sterile the fields of our agriculturists: deprived of the means of subsistence, they are reduced, like famished wolves, to prowl through the forsaken wood in quest of prey" (p. 339).

To settle on the land, most Europeans were supported by their government and favored removing First Nations from their ancestral lands onto reservations. The most detrimental effect of the imposed reserve system on First Nations was that they could no longer govern the social, political, and economic aspects of their own lives.

Frideres (1997) explained:

While we will not deny that Aboriginal people are exposed to a great deal of prejudice and discrimination, their greatest obstacle is the very structure of our society itself. Furthermore, we feel that there is a linkage between the

structural effects, the institutional arrangements of our society and the behavior of individuals. (p. 3)

Other important considerations for the Europeans' rationalization for the exploitation of resources and expropriation of lands range from the belief in Manifest Destiny to that of racial and cultural superiority of the British over First Nations people. By effectively taking land ownership through the signing of Treaties with First Nations, Europeans were able to legally expand and own the land and its resources. "For many European Americans, Indians were an obstacle to the spread of white Europeans from coast to coast. To make room for the expansion of whites, the options were genocide or containment on small farms and reservations" (Spring, 1997, p. 3).

Since the signing of the Treaties, the First Nations have continued to live in collective societies on Indian reserves regulated by the Government. However, First Nations leaders believed the Treaties set aside reserve lands for them to continue their way of life, their spiritual practices, and to be protected from the encroachment of the European settlers. While the Government felt these reserve lands initially would be used for First Nations to live on and to learn to farm, the Government believed that eventually they would become "civilized" so they would then assimilate into the Euro-Canadian Society. The Government felt that if this was successfully implemented, eventually there would not be an Indian problem. Littlebear et al. (1985) stated: "This policy has been based on the belief that social and, economic advancement towards equality with non-Indians, a necessary requisite for successful assimilation, could best

be achieved in insulated environments, under the tutelage of the Federal government” (p. 70).

Therefore, the development of reserves for First Nations people was just a temporary measure to control them. The government’s intention was to gradually do away with the reserves. J. L. Tobias, as cited in *Native People, Native Lands* (Cox, 1991), explained how the government used their legal authority to ban all religious practices. By the 1890s, the government took the final step to destroy the First Nation’s ability to live in their traditional manner by subjecting them to the game laws of the territory.

By these measures to deprive the Plains Indians of their leadership, social organizations, religion, their children, and their old source of livelihood, the government sought to prevent the reserves from becoming Indian homelands and to use them, instead, as devices of assimilation.

State

The colonization process continues through the utilization of Western institutions: governments, legislation, education, and religion. These institutions continue to impose their value systems with the intention of assimilating First Nations people into the Canadian public milieu. After centuries of colonialism, the Canadian government continues to utilize that legislative tool, the Indian Act, to legitimize the perception of Indians as their wards.

Kellough (1980) addressed the need for colonizers to possess the power to determine the institutions of the colonized. Once this is accomplished, they are in the

position to influence the colonized to accept the power of their colonizer; this converts mere power to authority. The colonizer sets itself in the position to define the reality of the colonized. Ross (1992) illuminated this Euro-Canadian perspective:

Never realizing that a gulf divides us, we have never stopped to explain ourselves to them. Instead, we blithely make pronouncements about what we will do for them and then impose our structures and institutions without ever explaining why we built them and how we believe they will produce the desired results. (p. xxv)

Buckley (1993) described the system set in place to settle the First Nations people as rooted in the harsh and paternalistic nineteenth-century mindset. Bull (1991) explained the term “paternalistic” and its implications:

Paternalism describes the relationship between Indian and those who conducted and administered their lives, the church and the Department of Indian Affairs which was one of following rules and regulations. In the end it was an unhealthy relationship where Indian people were looked after and treated like children; they were certainly thought of as children who did not know anything. (p. 56)

This paternalism has contributed to the loss of First Nations self-governing systems and the ability to make decisions for themselves.

The Indian Act also contributed to First Nations dependency. A huge bureaucratic structure, the Department of Indian Affairs, currently Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), was created. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's policies

demand consistency and predictability. Decisions are made top-down, a one-way flow of information. This rigid muscle-bound bureaucracy is a toxic, omnipotent structure which keeps the 633 First Nations communities in Canada divided and stratified. With this kind of structure attempting to govern the First Nations, it is no wonder that First Nations are in a dependent state, living below the poverty level and unable to address the important issues of self-governance. Morgan (as cited in Carlson, 1996) stated: “The mechanization approach to organization tends to limit rather than mobilize the development of human capacities, molding human beings to fit the requirements of mechanical organization rather than building the organization around the strengths and potentials” (p. 38).

Block (1996) wrote that the governance systems mainstream society has inherited and continues to create are based on sovereignty and a form of intimate colonialism:

We govern our organizations by valuing above all else, consistency, control and predictability. These become the means of dominance by which colonialism and sovereignty are enacted. It is not that we directly seek dominance, but our beliefs about getting work done have that effect. (p. 7)

Mercredi and Turpel (1993) stated that it has led to the rule over First Nations communities by a faceless bureaucracy so removed from Indian realities that it stumbles over its good intentions. In the manner of most bureaucracies, it tends to see Indian people as its property and is preoccupied with the control of that property.

The dilemma with which First Nations organizations are faced is that they have adopted the hierarchical structures of the bureaucracy and federal policies that are contradictory to their cultural way of governing themselves. Western insistence on creating hierarchies for everything is a major part of the problem First Nations face. The imposed elected systems of chiefs is contradictory to their cultural beliefs (Ross, 1996). Present day First Nations leadership is working within the systems dictated by the Indian and Northern Affairs. These same First Nations leaders unknowingly become the neo-colonizers.

Furthermore, the system of bureaucracy is created to legitimize itself. Although this is done to make itself look neutral, in fact, its interests are not neutral at all and are instead quite political and self-oriented. Paradoxically, the ideal of a Canadian society calls for open economic opportunity and an accumulation of wealth, while denying the same opportunity for First Nations. Friederes (1997) described it further: "In the nineteenth century, Indian land fueled American economic growth. However, dispossession had an opposite effect on the Indian Nations. While it led to Canadian economic development, it contributed to Native underdevelopment" (p. 66).

Institutions are created to reflect the beliefs and values of a society. Although Canadians believe they are a democratic society, the institutions they have created ensure that power, and control is maintained at the highest level. They have a vast bureaucracy with power, control, and resources concentrated at the very top, and in the hands of a select and privileged few.

Missionaries

On the cultural level, the colonizer possesses the power to define the reality of the colonized. This level is concerned with internal factors of colonization, which are the cultural and psychological components, explained Kellough (1980). Chrisjohn and Young (1997) further provided an analogy for the colonial process:

An effective system of colonial control, like well-maintained machinery, doesn't depend on anything extraordinary or unusual to function. Rather, when each part does what it was designed to do, with standard, periodic, servicing and an occasional refurbishing, the mechanism hums along nicely as it recreates the result it was designed to produce. (p. 237)

Clearly, the government, with the cooperation of the churches, provided an avenue by which this genocidal process could effectively destroy the culture, language, and spirituality of First Nations, all in the name of the true Christ. The government financed the building of residential schools across Canada and provided administrative funds to the Churches to proceed with Christianizing and schooling. The government contracted with four church groups in 1887. Bull (1991), Ing (1991), and Chrisjohn and Young (1997) wrote about the devastating legacy of this systematic genocidal tool on First Nations people. Friesen (1997) also recognized that the invaders initially gave little attention to such subjects as schooling because First Nations cultures were targeted for a quick takeover and/or annihilation.

To support the above arguments, Frideres (1997) showed that during the nineteenth century, the Natives fell victim to conscious and unconscious genocide. The

expansion of Western civilization that produced this result was viewed as a manifestation of Christianity. In colonial situations, missionary activity can be observed that is complementary to structural colonialism (Kellough, 1980). Missionaries played a significant role in the colonizing of First Nations people across Canada. The myth that First Nations were weaker races needing guidance and knowledge to develop into an advanced civilization was perpetuated by the colonizer. This was done so that the exploitation would not be seen for what it was, but, rather, as benevolence. Since the job of the missionaries was to civilize the First Nations person, and there was a perceived connection between civilization and Christianity, the Canadian Government contracted the services of different denominational groups across Canada. These religious denominations were given sole responsibility for the education of First Nations people and supported financially, albeit meagerly, by the Government.

The government built most residential schools off the reserves, as they were devised as a means of isolating children from their parents and the influence of the reserve (Kirkness, 1992). Like the reserve experience of their parents (where the First Nations people were secluded on plots of land and controlled by an Indian agent), these children were, in effect, isolated from their families and placed in an institution reserved for de-cultural practices. The children were removed from caring, loving homes into a harsh, cold, institutionalized reality. They were subjected to priests, nuns, lay teachers and supervisors who viewed them as heathens, and imparted the "fear of God" as a method of control.

The social issues facing the First Nations people must be exposed for what they are. The roots lie within the experience of thousands of First Nations children being removed from parents, communities, and their cultural way of knowing. They were driven in farm trucks to residential schools located miles away from their homes and stripped of their language, their culture, their spirituality, and their uniqueness.

Education was an essential part of cultural colonialism. These institutions were a nesting place for both government and religion to impart their shared common belief and attitudes towards First Nations people. Kellough (1980) listed their beliefs:

- Both considered First Nations as deviants to be brought into the secular fold.
- Both groups had the desire to assimilate First Nations and believed it was the best policy.
- Both believed they were acting in the interest of their wards and, whatever was done, was for their common good.
- Both share a sense of division “us” and “them.”
- Both felt superior, leaving First Nations inferior. (p. 366)

The aims of the colonizer is to make the colonized believe they have no culture at all, so what they did have was worthless and something of which to be ashamed. In her book, *Geniesh: An Indian Girlhood*, Willis (1973), a Cree woman, concludes her story of her residential school experiences with this account:

For 12 years I was taught to love my neighbor — especially if he was white — but to hate myself. I was made to feel untrustworthy, inferior, incapable, and

immoral. The barbarian in me, I was told, had to be destroyed if I was to be saved.

I was taught to feel nothing but shame for my "pagan savage" ancestors. . . . I was told I was intelligent, but not intelligent enough to think for myself. . . .

When I had been stripped of all pride, self-respect, and self-confidence, I was told to make something of myself to show the white men that not all Indians were savages or stupid. When I failed, I was told with a shrug, "Well what do you expect from an Indian."

For 12 years I was brainwashed into believing that "Indian" was synonymous with "sub-human," "savage," "idiot," and "worthless." It took almost that long for me to regain my self-respect, to feel whole once again. Now I can, once again, say with pride, "I am an Indian." (p. 199)

The devastating results in First Nations communities is that they feel helpless, controlled, directed, and hopeless because the Paternalistic Father, the Minister of the Department of Indian Affairs, still continues to dictate the policies and guidelines without the involvement of First Nations people. The education process, whether it was a provincial school, a reserve school, or a residential school, provided an institutionalized mechanism to systematically destroy the families, language, spirituality, identity, customs, and traditions of First Nations children. The institutionalized schools did not only deculturize students in their care, they also physically, sexually, emotionally, and spiritually abused them. This has been documented in the report of the Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (1996). This has been the cause for social chaos in First Nations communities.

Despite the fact that Kellough (1980) believed that the colonizers have achieved almost complete structural dominance over First Nations, First Nations must strive to establish their own institutions. In the manner that the colonizer utilized their educational institutions, so, too, will First Nations. Through the study of the colonization process, First Nations members will understand the effects this history has had on their people; the social problems they are now facing. They will take action by developing their own institutions and readdress programs of delivery which include educational curriculum, health, and mental health programs. Kellough stated that the first step in decolonizing is to become conscious. She stated, "It is absolutely essential that Indian people know their history" (p. 369).

The effects of the residential school experience are far-reaching. It has stalled First Nations communities from moving forward in the development of their institutions and policies. Unless it is understood, the First Nations people will perpetuate the systems that were designed by the colonizer.

Revitalization and Resurgence in First Nations Communities

In spite of the attacks on the First Nations since European arrival, today First Nations across the country are voicing, dialoguing, and taking action to revitalize culture. Frideres (1997) acknowledged, "With the emergence of Red Power, the sense of alienation experienced by many Natives has been dispelled by a new sense of

significance and purpose” (p. 409). He added, “The personal ethnic identity of Natives is stronger now than it has been for many decades” (p. 409).

One of the ways to have a better understanding of the responsibility is to understand and speak the First Nations languages, as this information is embedded in the oral tradition. Wilson (1999) posits, in *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native Americans*:

Identity survives most strongly in Indian oral tradition. As non-literate societies, pre-contact Native American peoples transmitted every aspect of their culture, from geography and knowledge of plants and animals to history and spiritual beliefs, through word of mouth. Stories, myths and legends therefore occupied an absolutely central place in their lives, embodying a people’s deepest sense of themselves and providing, often, the surest and most profound guide to their understanding of the world. Although thousands of these narratives have been lost, many have survived, too powerful, elusive and supple for even the most conscientious missionary to suppress. In scores of tribes, they have kept alive the historical knowledge central to any community — that, despite everything, we are still *us* rather than *them*. (p. xxvii)

Oral tradition is inherent to native languages. “Most native groups know that language, the means of communication and the vehicle of ideas and belief, is a vital aspect of their culture,” wrote Peelman (1995, p. 32). Through this understanding, the First Nations can begin to focus on their abilities to make meaningful changes to their

social, political, economic, and educational systems. At the same time, the cultural foundations they still value will be recalled, validated, and practiced.

The effects of institutional colonization, leaving a community of people dependent and victimized, are the struggles that need to be overcome by community leaders as they journey back to the cultural roots. S. Powderface (as cited in Littlebear et al., 1985) acknowledged the effects of a foreign structure, with its political and legal systems, and to their underlying values to which First Nations people have been subjected. He suggested that these systems have not conformed to values which First Nations people have lived. He recommended that if we believe we are to survive as First Nations people, we must return to our traditional institutions and values as prescribed by our elders, and begin building our communities accordingly. Before colonization undermined First Nations governance systems, our people were guided by traditional political thought founded on the Natural Law. Black Elk (as cited in Thorpe, 1996) stated, "If you look at our government, economy, social and judicial structures prior to the reservation era, they all are tied to the sacred teachings. These teachings give us a foundation" (p. 149).

Ross (1996), in reference to Natural law stated, "I kept hearing from Aboriginal people across the continent—the declaration that Aboriginal law does not come from human beings, but from the Creator" (p. 258). "The primary law of Indian government is the spiritual law. Spirituality is the highest form of politics, and our spirituality is directly involved in government. . . . Spirituality was the foundation and the nexus of traditional social and political organization," stated O. Lyons (as cited in Littlebear et

al., 1992, p. 3). Mercerdi and Turpel (1993) added that, “We practiced our spirituality or religion, which is in fact very simple: honour all living creation and maintain the balance of nature” (p. 17). Communities governed themselves through a collective sense of responsibility. The key to ensuring that all voices were involved in the decision-making process was through a consensus model. Every community member had a sense of purpose along with a clear vision of what future generations could expect of the community’s continuity. “Consensus decision-making that involve everyone . . . means that responsibility is put back where it belongs—in the hands of our people,” explained Mercerdi and Turpel (1993, p. 90). In addition, the First Nations’ belief is that our individual actions are not in isolation from others because we are all interconnected. Therefore, each generation is responsible, “to look seven generations into the future whenever substantial change is being contemplated” (Ross, 1993, p. 75). This is elaborated on by Hill (1995):

It is our responsibility, as the seventh generation, to make a better world for the next seven generations. . . According to Iroquois philosophy, all decisions made in the present should be made with the principle that it should benefit seven generations ahead. The present generation has also been identified as the seventh generation since the arrival of the Europeans in North America (p. 57).

York (1992) described his understanding of the prophecy of our ancestors. He spoke to the hopes and aspirations of the leaders and elders as they signed the Treaties in the following excerpt:

When the Indian chiefs of the Canadian Prairies signed their treaties in the 1870s, they were starving and demoralized. Their way of life was already disappearing under the pressures of white settlement, disease and alcohol. But as they signed the documents that surrendered their land to the whiteman, they looked into the future. In treaty after treaty, they talked about their descendants. They spoke of their “children’s, children’s, children’s, children’s children.” This vision, which became known as the fifth-generation prophecy, has been widely interpreted to mean that the fifth generation would witness the rebirth of the Indian people. The chiefs were looking toward a day when their people would again have strength and a renewed confidence and pride in their identity. (p. 262)

In the United States, a similar experience had transpired where the American government officials were engaged in battles and treaties with the tribes indigenous to the land. A poignant declaration was offered by a warrior chief of the Lakota nation in respect to the vision of the generations unborn:

The greatest humiliation that we will go through as Indian people is to lay down our arms to see beyond the horizon, from where our generation of grandchildren is going to come. If we do not make peace, we will stand separately and we will be weak as a nation. Today, I lay down my weapon in front of my wife and my grandchildren for I, Red Cloud, pray that we work together so that we may take the good out of our relatives and use it. And we will give the goodness of ourselves to them. (Looks for Buffalo Hand, 1998, p. 17)

The grandchildren described above have survived through an inhospitable milieu since the signing of the treaties. Nonetheless, survival is apparent and the stories are still being spoken, the languages are thriving, and the ceremonies are continued. It is in earnest, that the current generations of First Nations across the lands of North America are seeking to bring the vision of their forefathers to the forefront.

The teaching stories of the *Spirit of the Red People*, inclusive of the four gifts and the seven laws, will be related to provide the direction of the oral nature of the Cree people and their history. The following story was revealed by an Anishnabe visionary, D. Courchene, of Sageen, Manitoba during a "Knowing Our Spirits" conference held in Edmonton, Alberta in November 1997. Courchene described himself as a messenger and offered this story as an explanation of the role that First Nations must assume in order to fully incite the Creator's will. This story is authenticated through the voices of other writers, native and nonnative, who are cited throughout the telling of this oral tradition, thus lending to its reliability:

The Creator had a vision in creating the world and, therefore, when placing the humans in their homelands, each was given a responsibility and a gift. The responsibility was in relation to the four elements, earth, wind, water, and fire, that would be the peoples' learning. Suzuki and Knudtson (1993) confirmed that the four elements "are ordered and arrayed in an infinite number of combinations and constitute the essential ingredients of the entire cosmos and of the life-forms — including human beings — that animate it" (p. 57). Then, as a complement, the Creator gave each human race a gift to nurture and eventually share their understanding of the power and

wisdom gained by honing their gift. Then, as the Creator created each human race, he bestowed upon them the colors of the east, red as the dawning sun, yellow, the color of the sun at midday, black, the color of the night sky, and white, the color of the northern snows. In the *Learning Journey on the Red Road*, Looks for Buffalo Hand (1998) described this occurrence as “over the years, we the nations of this world have drifted apart. We have been put on separate islands as a test and now we have been given the biggest test of all — to unite as one people” (p. 31). Eventually, the people will be prepared to unite themselves and share the gifts and responsibilities that they have inherited in the land of truth, the Americas. Looks for Buffalo Hand said about Creator’s will: “His knowledge and goodness are perfect and he is the author of the truth” (p. 16).

The Creator’s vision was given as a gift to the eastern Red People. The east is the place where life begins and is where the circle starts as in the dawning of the sun. Bopp, Bopp, Brown, and Lane (1989) stated, “The east is the direction from which the new day comes into the world. It is the direction of renewal. It is the place of innocence, guilelessness, spontaneity, joy and the capacity to believe in the unseen” (p. 42). To keep this gift, the Red People would be granted the power to remember the laws of the Creator, the stories, and the language of the heart. This oral tradition would contain the vision of the Creator who created in us the ability to nourish and nurture the spirit no matter what chaos, trouble, or turmoil befell the people. “In the East of the medicine wheel, a good leader learns to see things as they are connected to all other things, to be self-reliant, to have hope for the people and to trust in his vision”

(Bopp et al., 1989, p. 43). There are among the Red People those who made the commitment to carry this knowledge and wisdom to the next generation by selecting the carriers of the spirit of the Red People. This attribute is described by Bopp et al.: “The essence of what it is to be a human being is to be found in service to others. This is the greatest of all the lessons of the medicine wheel” (p. 47).

The responsibility of the Red People is the land. The land is theirs to steward. The animals, plant life, and their relationships to the earth were taught to the Red People through stories. These stories were accompanied by seasonal ceremonies and rituals for the purpose of maintaining balance between the earth and the sky. The Red People learned of their responsibility and continued to preserve the balance between taking and giving back based on need and use on the land known as Turtle Island (the Americas). In this area of responsibility, the Red People have learned the sacredness of our mother the earth. Monture-Angus (1995) succinctly described this relationship between the earth and the people as, “The earth is mother. The sky is father. Woman is earth and earth is woman. They are inseparable” (p. 194). Furthermore, Banyanca (as cited in Crozier-Hogle & Wilson, 1997) stated:

Mother Earth is a living being, a powerful being. Everything comes from this Mother Earth. . . . Native people, who have the brown color of Mother Earth, were placed on this side of the world called America today. Most of the Native people were placed on this side to keep this land in balance with prayer, meditation, and ceremony. (p. 43)

The Red People have been granted the responsibility to maintain the Creator's vision on this land. The sacredness of this responsibility and the gift of vision is heralded across the land, in the four directions: the east coast, the west coast, south to the tip of South America, and north to Alaska. That was known to the elders a long time ago. They told us that in order to keep this land alive and in balance we had to perform our ceremonies in our own language, because language is very important (Banyanca, as cited in Crozier-Hogle & Wilson, 1997).

Moving in the direction of the sun, we approach the south of the circle and here are located the Yellow People, who are the Oriental, the second youngest of the human beings. "The people of the yellow color are thought to be younger still, and their special gifts and responsibilities have to do with the understandings of the human mind and body" (Ross, 1996, p. 273). Their responsibility is the air element. They have learned to use air for health and vitality. Their traditions include discipline and the practice of martial arts, breathing, and revitalization through the Chi flow of life's energy.

The gift given to the Oriental people by the Creator has to do with emotions, as these are linked with the body and mind. In *Healing Emotions: Conversations With the Dalai Lama on Mindfulness, Emotions, and Health*, Goleman (1997) wrote:

Buddhism has as principal aims the goal of transforming perception and experience and synchronizing mind and body . . . based on the practice of various forms of meditation, coupled with a moral imperative to engage in virtuous

action. Such action is based on the awareness of the interdependence of all life and the universal compassion that emerges from this awareness. (p. 4)

The oriental people of this tradition have navigated the teachings about the emotions and their relationship to the energy of well being, vital life forces, health, and meditations. From these traditions, we can understand and practice the steadfastness associated with attending to our emotional health and well being. Bopp et al. (1989) suggested that, “the most difficult and valuable gift to be sought in the South of the medicine wheel is the capacity to express feelings openly and freely in ways that do not hurt other beings” (p. 51).

Moving forward in the circle, we approach the direction of the west and the Black people who Ross (1996) described as “the oldest group, for the teaching says that we are not, as peoples, all of the same age” (p. 272). The gift of the Black people is that of the physical dimension as related to the body. The Black people have been granted this gift “to develop self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-determination” (Odjig White, as cited in O’Meara & West, 1996, p. 118). They have even been exploited for the wonders and labors produced with their physical strengths, and through sheer tenacity and oneness with their physical strengths have liberated themselves.

The responsibility of the Black people is water and in learning how to use it for the benefits of life. As evidence, blood plasma, a medical breakthrough, was discovered by a black scientist. “The west is the source of rain and water, which is used for purification. . . . Water gives us renewed life, release from ignorance of our ways, and personal growth” (Looks for Buffalo Hand, 1998, p. 14). The Blacks were leaders in

and among the people before they were oppressed. The great kings and nobility of the pre-Christian era were black. Egypt, Mesopotamia, and all these biblical places were sanctified by rivers (water) and seas.

Moving to the final direction of the North locates the White people in the circle. The White people were given the gift of fire to learn and control. Ross (1996) suggested that of the four people, the white people are the youngest. They developed this gift with thoroughness and to their advantage. Using the spark, motors, generators, and electrical power have been created. Since then, other uses of fire have resulted in electricity, microwave, fibre optic, laser, and atomic energy capacities. The engine is the most basic equipment in all aspects of home, work, and leisure activities. These inventions have made life easier to live and life expectancy has increased due to the aid of technology.

The White people have been granted the responsibility of the mind. They were to develop rationality and communication. They are responsible for “bringing about effective communication and understanding between all the peoples of Mother Earth, for without that there can be no real sharing of the gifts that each bring for all to use” (Ross, 1996, p. 273). They have used rationality as a tool to exploit human beings and Mother Earth and have capitalized the whole of the circle. The mind is powerful but requires the balance of the heart. “When we stand in the North, we can look over to the South and see ourselves singing the tender songs of love, and we realize that to know and understand is not only a thing of the head, but also of the heart” (Bopp et al., 1989, p. 71). Additionally, Bopp et al. suggested that when, “A person who would

dwelling forever in the North, shutting out the gifts of the other directions, will become gripped with an icy coldness like that of winter, for she will be cut off from the warmth of her own heart" (p. 69).

The vision of the Creator is that each component of the circle would develop their gift and responsibility and when they were ready, would come to the land of the Red People. Here, they were to create opportunities for dialogue where sharing their gifts would result. Then, when each of the gifts have been shared and everyone is living the integrity of the four gifts, the Creator's vision would be realized. The people would recognize that in unity they are stronger. DeMallie and Parks (1987) considered the Lakota people regarding the essence of belief: "The unity of Wakan Tanka embraced all time and space, together with the entirety of being, in a universe where the place of human beings was minor but well-defined" (p. 31). Thus, this story of the Creator's vision is passed on orally to remind the people about the need to consider the greatest event that is within our power to realize. This story of vision is also taught with the seven laws given to the people to live and know their place in the tapestry of life:

The Creator gave the people seven laws a long time ago (O'Meara & West, 1996). These laws of the Creator will assure the vision of unity as the people came together to share and celebrate their ways of knowing. The seven laws are protected by an ascribed being of creation, whether of the visible world or invisible world. "Often people use animals to symbolize certain qualities. . . . Many cultures throughout Mother Earth use similar symbolic teachers in their stories and lessons" (Bopp et al.,

1989, p. 36). These protectors share the truth of their lives as in their characteristics, attributes, and habits with the people.

The Creator gave us the first law of love. Before we come to live in this world, we promised the Creator that when we are born and throughout our lives, we will love one another. When we look upon the world from the other side, it is our choice to walk on earth and be the loving human beings. Looks for Buffalo Hand (1998) stated, "there is discipline and sternness with love, there is commitment for life, and there is no consciousness of other nationalities" (p. 9). The eagle is the messenger of this law, it stands for love. We say that the eagle is our relative and we are honored when we see the eagle in our dreams and everyday lives. We bestow upon each other the eagle feather, a significant honor to speak our love for each other on special occasions of our lives. The eagle is a visionary bird, it is the Creator's vision of a world where love is the first law of relationship.

The second law is respect. The Creator wanted creation to be respected to ensure continuity and interdependence of life. When we respect each other, we are living the second law. The teacher of this law has been the buffalo. They know of respect and have carried this on for us.

Following respect, we must practice the third law of courage. We are courageous in our intent to retain the vision of the Creator. To bring unity to the land and humanity requires courage. We also practice courage in our ability to hone our unique gifts as human beings and use these gifts to fulfil our purpose in life. The teacher of courage is the bear. The bear is the being that has offered its life to the maintenance of

our well being. It is a kind spirit in that they watch over us and help us whenever we need courage to carry on.

Then, the fourth law is honesty. We are to lead honest lives. For whatever we do, we must do in complete honesty with ourselves and others. This keeps our heart, mind, and spirit, full of integrity. The teacher of honesty has been the “Sabe” or “Mistapew” who dwells in the unseen aspects of our world. Sabe or Mistapew is often called “Bigfoot,” a term that does not reflect on their being favorably. However, Mistapew is a kind, honest being that honors his relationships and adheres to this law. These beings are closely knit, have the ability to heal, and give freely of their powers when necessary.

The fifth law of humility is taught to humanity by the wolf. Humility is an attribute that is preceded by kindness. A human being must have the kindness and love for others to be humble. Humility is also a state where the person who, upon using their gift, does so with generosity and love as the reason. The wolf clans are teachers of humility, as they are hunters like our people. The lead wolf, when taking down the animal they are hunting, will allow others of his clan to eat first. Then when everyone has had an opportunity to eat, the lead wolf will humbly partake of the feast.

The sixth law of wisdom is one that leads humanity to use their sacred gift with purposeful intention. As each of us was born into this world to love one another, we are given a gift that will help us to live purposeful lives. When we use our gifts with the purpose of helping and advancing our fellow human beings, we are practicing the law of wisdom. The beaver is the teacher of wisdom as they, too, have been granted a

gift. The gift is in their front teeth which are home building tools, weapons, for food foraging, and all purposeful in their daily lives. Each day of life, the beaver uses this gift wisely. They build their homes, dam streams and ponds to create ecosystems for their families, and gather food, all with their teeth. The day the beaver decides to stop using their gift and becomes lazy, is the first day of their death. This is because the gift does not resist growth, it was meant to be used every waking day of their lives. After a length of time of doing nothing with their gift, the beaver is at the mercy of its growing teeth which will eventually pierce its own body and cause its death. This is a lesson that we humans must perceive as important in how we use our gifts given to us by the Creator. Monture-Angus (1995) agreed that, "Wisdom comes from what we do with our life experiences. Wisdom is about how we make our life experiences work for us, after we have worked to understand what the experiences mean" (p. 77).

The seventh law is truth. Truth is the final law because it is so vital to the laws above it. We find our truth by practicing the six laws of love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, and wisdom. The teacher of truth is the turtle. The turtle has a hard shell and carries the Creator's laws on its back. The turtle has the ability to go inside and be introspective, as "truth is internal to the self," said Monture-Angus (1995, p. 217). On the other hand, the turtle has the ability to be outside, observant, and aware of its surroundings. We need to have these attributes and to achieve introspection; we have the vision quest. During a vision quest, the person is giving up physical needs in order to focus energy on the internal strengths, to sharpen their senses, and realize the meaning of their lives. At this time, the person sits quietly on mother earth

in a pristine area and joins the natural flow of the earths' beauty and rhythm. Wind, sky, earth, and fire are abundantly available to reflect upon the interrelationships of human, plant, animal, and with the cosmos. The truth is also revealed in who we are, our purpose, and why we have maintained the seven laws to carry out the vision of the Creator. Looks for Buffalo Hand (1998) said, "We, the Indian people, never lost our spirituality because we were given laws — the seven ritual laws — to guide our lives" (p. 8). He further asserts that:

The time has come for all the people of this world to come together to the heartbeat of Mother Earth — to respect each other and all the things that the Creator has given us — so that some day we may become of one mind, one heart, and one spirit. . . . because our blood is one. (p. 8)

In this engaging liturgy, Courchene's (as cited in Dickason, 1997) message reminds the people of their inherent right to dialogue, rediscovering their authentic voice, and to act with compassion for the reunification of all people. This story serves as the vision, it is the truth of the "Spirit of the Red People" and is revealed for the purpose of rooting the findings of this study in the oral tradition.

First Nations Governance and Leadership

Mercerdi and Turpel (1999) wrote, "Cree people have always been very egalitarian. Above all else, we believe in sharing and giving" (p. 20). Traditional teachings founded upon First Nations spiritual beliefs influenced how ancestral communities were organized on a day-to-day basis. A sense of harmony and accord within the community are attributable to egalitarianism and participatory democracy.

This type of social organization required situational leadership. Leaders, first and foremost, were servants of the people they served. M. Smallface Marule (as cited in Littlebear et al., 1992) explained: “In traditional Indian Societies, whether band or clan, authority was a collective right that could be temporarily delegated to a leader, under restrictive conditions, to carry out essential activities. But the responsibility and authority always remained with the people” (p. 36). In living this belief, leadership was transformational. Robin Sharma (1998) expounded on the criteria for visionary leadership as follows:

Visionary leaders care more about doing what’s right than appearing intelligent. Leadership is not about popularity, it’s about integrity. It’s not about power, it’s about purpose. And it’s not about title but rather talent. Visionary leaders see themselves as liberators rather than limiters of human talent. Their primary purpose is to develop their people’s full potential. (p. 68)

Servant leadership is a growing trend in post modern theory. Greenleaf (1991) suggested, servant leaders are closer to the ground — they hear things, see things, know things, and their intuitive insight is exceptional. This explains why First Nations traditional leaders assumed a servant role to ensure that the interests of the whole community were minded. And further, “For the Cree people, leaders were chosen because of their qualities of strength and responsibility” (Mercerdi & Turpel, 1999, p. 21).

On a final note, G. Sarris (as cited in Crozier-Hogle & Wilson, 1997), a current day indigenous author and professor of English at the University of California, surmised:

We believe that truth is like a cork in water. No matter how much you or somebody else tries to push it down — especially another people, invaders — eventually it's going to float back to the top. . . . We're all buckets of water with corks in them, and we're all looking for our ways to let that truth come up.
(pp. 226-267)

Summary

The First Nations-Euro-Canadian relationship has evolved from one of equal partners to that of a colonizer and the colonized. Through the implementation of Euro-Canadians' legislative laws and the utilization of their institutions, they have subdued First Nations into a dependent state. The intention of Euro-Canadians was to neutralize First Nations people by isolating them onto reserves, outlawing their ceremonial practices, and removing their children, so that eventually there would not be a First Nations person. Then, the ideal of capitalism and individualism would thrive because they would have removed the original land owners.

Despite this history, First Nations have shown resiliency by surviving this onslaught. They continue to practice their beliefs, values, and traditions. First Nations elders have expressed their belief that the fifth, sixth, and seventh generations would awake and remember who they are, their purpose on Turtle Island, and use the gift of

vision given to them by the Creator to ensure all people on earth live in balance and harmony.

The next chapter contains the methods and procedures followed in the study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Qualitative participatory research provides the opportunity for the researcher and participants to interact through an investigative process. This method of research is used to understand the experience of First Nations people. The participants described the impact of European values on their societies and, in doing so, brought these realities to a conscious awareness. Kellough (1980) reminded us that consciousness is not a goal, but rather, a precondition to action. Research designed to give voice to a people who have been silenced is appropriate for this study. It is for this reason a qualitative approach, a grounded theory methodology (where one looks for data rather than look at data) thus leading to an emerging theory, is used. This research method presented opportunities for First Nations participants to provide their understanding of core Cree values and beliefs to guide their leadership in the development of their own governance structures. In addition, they identified the change processes required to transform a powerless, dependent community into a self-sufficient, healthy community.

As a Cree-speaking First Nations member doing this intensive fieldwork, the researcher was authentically immersed in her First Nations community. Swisher (1986)

described authentic researchers as those who are members of the group about whom they write. She further added, the benefits of the “Insider” approach have been identified as sensitivity to the best interests of the people studied, and greater knowledge about the community. All theories developed in Western behavioral science are based on tacit premises of Western culture, usually the middle-class version most typical of professionals. Spradley (1980) wrote that one of the problems of people who learn a culture is that they are imprisoned without knowing it. “Culture bound” is living inside of a particular reality that is taken for granted as the “reality.” Being a positioned subject and a Cree speaker provided an advantage, and is a critical variable in this research.

A major focus of this study, therefore, was to explore, analyze, interpret, and integrate the data generated in the culturally-coherent interviews and the culturally-consistent research process offered by participatory, grounded theory. As a First Nations member, I can attest to Wolcott’s (1995) statement that while ethnographers use the methods of participant observation and intensive fieldwork, what made the approach distinct was the matter of interpreting and applying the findings from a cultural perspective. Grounded theory is a transactional system in which the method allowed me to examine the interactive nature of events.

Methodological Overview

The grounded theory approach provided for theory to evolve as First Nations members voiced their present day lived experiences and identified their cultural values and beliefs. The grounded theory approach is a qualitative research method that Strauss

and Corbin (1990) contend is used as a systematic set of procedures. These procedures develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon from the viewpoint of the participants, and not merely that of the researcher. The phenomenon studied met the central criteria for judging the applicability of this theory: fit, understanding, generality, and control (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). The availability of information is limited in the literature currently, but using grounded theory to study this phenomenon “fits.” When one understands the oral tradition and gives meaning to those experiences in the present day context, First Nations people can act from a position of conscious awareness to gain freedom from oppression. The data provided a broad base to apply to First Nations experiences across the continent, therefore, implicit in its generality. Finally, to support the criteria of control, Barnes (1996) wrote, “Only by attending to the cultures of the respondents and of the researchers can the social sciences create sufficiently rich inductively derived grounded theory” (p. 429). Hence, through the information received from the participants, data analysis, and insights gathered from the investigative process, theory emerged on how First Nations cultural practices could be utilized as a foundation for community action.

Human beings act toward things based on the meanings the things have for them; “meanings of such things is derived from the social interaction the individual has with his fellows; and meanings are handled in, and modified through an interpretive process and by the person dealing with the things they encounter” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Strauss and Corbin (1990) also concurred that, “Action and/or interaction lie at the heart of grounded theory” (p. 159).

Research Design

One strategy used to generate data is the interview. Merriam (1988) stated that an interview is a conversation, but a conversation with a purpose. She also states that a common way in deciding the type of interview is determined by the amount of structure desired. The nature of the study, cultural expectations, and personal knowledge of all participants called for a loosely-structured format. This format was complementary to First Nations cultural practices, and the conversational process provided time for reflection and dialogue natural to the participants.

Data were gathered through a series of conversations with seven Saddle Lake First Nations members whose life experiences varied. The initial interview was done where it was most comfortable or convenient for them: either in their homes or in their offices and, in one case, in the researcher's home. The second interview occurred once the participants received transcripts from their initial interview. The final group videotaped interview was done at Blue Quills First Nations College.

In the initial interview, questions (Appendix A) were open-ended, but some minor changes were made after the first interview. These revised questions were presented to the other six participants who had been informed that the terminology was changed after the first interview. The questions utilized for the second interview were different and narrowed on their knowledge of the historical perspective of the roles of leadership in the signing of Treaties in 1876. A different set of open-ended questions were presented to the group at their group video-taped interview.

Research Questions

The study explored two research questions:

1. What are the Cree core values and beliefs?
2. How can these beliefs be used to change our neo-colonial attitudes and then assist us to reshape our self-governance systems?

In recognizing the delegitimizing influence of European Society, the leadership of the Cree (people) governing body can make alternative decisions based on this new knowledge. These questions are addressed through research conversations using a grounded theory model.

Entry to the Population

This grounded theory participatory qualitative research took me back into my First Nations community. Swisher (1986) states the importance of minority researchers conducting research about the groups of which they are members. This has been stressed and encouraged by the educational research community.

Knowledge of protocols, political activities in the community, Cree language fluency, and relationships are all key elements to the success of data gathering in First Nations communities.

Growing up in the Saddle Lake First Nations community and speaking the Cree language, I was taught the Cree First Nations protocol when approaching respected elders. Part of the protocol was to make a tobacco offering to all of the participants for their stories. Lightning (1992) explained that protocols involve actions and statements that may be outwardly simple and straightforward, or they may be complex, involving

preparation of something. He added that it would be a mistake to say that what is presented is symbolic of whatever may be requested, or the relationship that is hoped will be established, because it is much more than symbolic.

Throughout the last 35 years, I have worked with all the participants in different capacities. I know all of them personally, and I am related to all of them through marriage, or family and extended family.

Since I was working in my community, I was aware of the activities taking place in the community and issues affecting families. During the data collection process, for example, I was aware of an election of political leaders in the community. After the first interview, two participants were involved in an election in their community. They were both running as candidates for Council positions. Therefore, data collection had to be postponed. Secondly, one of the participants was not able to continue with the second and third interview because of a serious illness in her family. Qualitative research “has an advantage in explaining why things happen the way they do,” wrote Hess (1992, p. 180), and in following with that concept, Merriam (1988) stated that qualitative research is primarily concerned with process rather than outcomes or products.

Selection of Site/Participants

I chose to work in my community in northeast Alberta. I decided to include members from Saddle Lake First Nations because it is the largest reserve in northeast Alberta. Saddle Lake First Nations have maintained control of its administration since 1967. This community has a population of over 6,500 members. They also have many

people who have had various leadership experiences. It is a community with many religious denominations and practicing spiritual/healer/teacher elders. The members of this community have various educational experiences, including the residential school, provincial school, First Nations locally controlled education institutions, and provincial post-secondary institutions.

As a positioned subject (Rosaldo, 1989) of the Saddle Lake First Nations community, I was afforded first hand knowledge of the community members. I was aware of the participants' formal and informal educational experiences, their community involvement, employment histories and the leadership experiences.

Originally, predetermined criteria for participant selection was planned; however, they did not necessarily have to meet all six criteria. All had leadership experience, worked in First Nations communities, and knew and practiced their culture. Four men and three women were chosen for this study. Participants ranged in ages from 30 to 65 years. Additional criteria included: (a) gender equity — males and females equally represented in this study, (b) leadership experience with First Nations, (c) knowledge and practice of the cultural traditions and spiritual ceremonies, (d) experience with various educational settings, for example, residential, provincial and/or First Nations locally controlled school, (e) fluency and/or understanding of Cree, and (f) experience with working in a First Nations community.

According to Johnson (1990) participants are often selected on the basis of their attributes. These may include access to certain kinds of information or knowledge that may be a function of such things as social status, position in an organization, or

comprehension of cultural knowledge. These particular participants were chosen because of their wisdom, insight, knowledge, experience, and their ability to articulate their experiences.

The participants were willing to have their names used for this study. The type of information provided by the participants was based on their personal stories. It is important to give them voice, but also to give them credit for their vast amount of knowledge.

Schatzman and Strauss (1973) cautioned their readers of the potentiality of: first, not being able to get a site for the purpose of the study; second, the need to establish their credibility; and finally, their need to develop relationships. There was no difficulty in any of these three aspects, but I was aware that the timing for the interview process was crucial.

Data Collection

In grounded theory, sampling is purposive. Therefore, participants were chosen who were able to provide rich descriptions of the experiences under study, were articulate with their experiences, and were willing to give complete and sensitive accounts as recommended by Wilson and Hutchinson (1991).

Each of the participants was informed of his/her role and the process to be used was described. The researcher informed them beforehand that at least three interview sessions would be held with each of them, and that notes would be taken at these interviews. All participants were in agreement with this process.

Two of the interview conversations were audio-taped, and the third interview was video-taped. As noted earlier, the interviews had minimal structure since this provided participants the freedom to explore topics in depth. Open-ended questions were used to allow the participants to enter into a dialogue, sharing their meaningful experiences, philosophies, and beliefs. The theory emerged as more questions were asked and more data were collected from the participants. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stressed that “data collection and data analysis are tightly interwoven processes, and must occur alternately because the analysis directs the sampling of data” (p. 59). Accordingly, the interviews and field notes were transcribed and analyzed before going to the next interview or field observations because it provided guidance to the next interview/field observation. Spradley and McCurdy (1972) also stressed the importance of keeping field notes (which should include what is observed and what the participants inform him/her), saying that the most productive research-informant relationship will be wasted if the informant’s words are lost.

All participants were comfortable with audio and video-taped sessions, and the note-taking. Directly after the interview, the tapes were transcribed. With the exception of the interviews done in Cree, all transcripts were completed within 2 days of the interview. It took more than 2 weeks to transcribe and translate the interviews done in Cree. Observations of their activities during visits in their community were also made. Those participants who are fluent Cree speakers and preferred to speak in their language were interviewed in Cree.

In transcribing and translating the material, participants were asked to explain various words, and then later a Cree-fluent speaker was asked to review the researcher's translation to ensure its language validity and correctness.

Individual Interviews

The initial contact with the seven participants was very informal; I explained my research study and invited them to participate in the study. As is the First Nations protocol, I offered tobacco in return for the participant's information and knowledge.

Lightning (1992) referred to protocol as:

any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by ancient tradition, that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request. . . . The protocols may often involve the presentation of something. (p. 216)

All participants agreed to participate in the research study at the first meeting. One of my participants requested that the questions be given to her several weeks prior to the established meeting date. Others were informed of the type of questions at the initial meeting. I had to keep abreast of the activities of each of the participants to ensure that I could make an appointment that would be convenient to them. Appointments were made with each to ensure that our schedules coincided. A follow-up meeting with each was arranged within a time frame that allowed for the transcription and translation of the first interviews. Prior to my interviewing the participants, they were telephoned to make arrangements for the interview. At this interview, I explained the purpose of my research, my interest in the topic, and explained the reason for the

participant's signature on the consent form (Appendix B). All participants signed the Consent form, and all with the exception of one agreed to use their own Christian names, rather than retaining anonymity. One suggested using her Cree spiritual name for the purpose of this study. My first interview was held July, 1998; others were held in September and November, due to holiday schedules of the participants and to other extenuating circumstances. All interviews were audio tape-recorded, and notes were taken for clarification purposes only.

Grounded theory provides for theory to evolve. Therefore, unlike other qualitative methods, a narrow focus on the research problem is not required beforehand, as this would constrain the researcher to previously developed theory. Open-ended questions were used as an interview approach, which provided the opportunity to ask the general questions while also having the ability to explore other interesting information (see Appendix A). Initially, it appeared that the participants' stories were not relevant to the general questions; but these stories later provided much of the philosophy, values, and beliefs.

The first interview lasted from 1½ to 2 hours, but I spent up to a total of 6 hours with some of the participants in one setting. It is important to develop a trusting relationship in order to get the required information.

The second set of interviews began in March, 1999. I had returned the transcribed text to three of the participants in January, and I returned the other four transcribed interviews to the others prior to their second interview in March. The second interview was based on the information that evolved from the first interview,

these questions were based on the knowledge of the participants of the Treaty-making process (see Appendix A). This was in keeping with the questions of traditional leadership prior to the European influence. The second interviews did not last as long as the first interview; they ranged from ½ to 1½ hours since I had already developed a relationship with the participants in the first interview. I was able to interview six of the seven participants. The participant I was not able to interview was coping with a life- threatening illness in the family.

The time frame between the second and third interviews that allowed for transcription, data analysis, and literature review was approximately 6 weeks. The transcription and data analysis were given to each participant prior to organizing a third meeting. The time frame allowed me to formulate additional questions along with reviewing the literature. The participants were engaged in the analysis process by continually refining the development of their theory.

Group Interview

This third meeting was intended to generate additional dialogue among all participants. This meeting was video and audio-taped and used for analysis. A group interview was arranged after completion of the second interview. Four of the seven participants were available for the interview. Six of the participants had agreed to attend the final group interview, but due to some of their busy schedules, the date of the group meeting was postponed for another 2 weeks. Prior to the appointed date for the group interview, each participant was telephoned to remind him/her of the interview. One was not able to attend due to medical reasons, the second was called to an

emergency meeting, while the third was not available because of the serious illness of a family member. Four of the seven participants attended.

Another set of open-ended questions was given to the four participants, and the room was set up in a circular fashion so that the participants would dialogue on the questions (see Appendix A). The purpose of the videotaped interview was to allow for each of the participants to dialogue in a nurturing environment, and through dialogue it would allow the participants to broaden or remind them of their own knowledge as they interacted with each other. O'Meara and West (1996) explained the significance of the circle in facilitating discussion. They directed attention to how the sharing circle is in some way a microcosm of the entire life history of the community in which they take place. Rather than producing "methods," they re-produce the history and life of the community. This session was also audio-taped for transcription purposes. This videotaped session lasted 2 hours.

Throughout the study, I engaged myself in the review of the literature to ensure that the concepts and relationships against actual data were checked. This provided a direct theoretical sampling and was used as a supplementary validation; it also helped ground my own assumptions about the interview data to concepts related to the historical and political conditions that the methodology uncovered.

Protection of Participants

The nature of the qualitative research study utilizing grounded theory has minimal risk to the participants, except for the demands on their time. This participatory research model allows for the participants to develop their own theory and,

therefore, it provides a wonderful chance to exalt the knowledge of the participants. Community leaders have continuously discussed the need for this information; they are concerned that if it is not documented, it will eventually die with the elders. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked if he/she was willing to be recognized by name, as they will be contributing to the continued survival of their culture and will provide the direction required by First Nations communities to make changes.

All participants were informed of the results and given copies of any pertinent information. At the initial meeting, they were informed that if, for any reason, they needed to withdraw from the study, they could do so. One of the participants was not able to provide me with the second and final interview because of a serious illness in her family.

All guidelines set forth by the Committee of Protection of Human Subjects of the University of San Diego were followed. This approval was granted by the committee prior to the data collection.

Approach to Data Analysis

Grounded theory analysis begins simultaneously with data collection, states Wilson and Hutchinson (1991). Strauss and Corbin (1990) emphasize that data collection and data analysis are tightly interwoven processes, and must occur alternately because the analysis directs the sampling of data. After each interview, tapes were transcribed, translated and, data analysis began.

Six of the initial interviewees either spoke in fluent Cree or a mixture of Cree and English. I am a Cree-speaker and was able to translate the interviews, but I asked

advice from participants, elders and other knowledgeable Cree-speakers to confirm my understanding of the depth and the meaning of the language. L. R. Bull (1991), a Cree First Nations member, wrote of the importance of understanding the language and being aware of the implications and insinuations being contextually employed and interpreted. The Roman Orthography method was used to transcribe the Cree interviews, then I reviewed the transcription and translated directly from Cree to English, where possible. After transcribing these interviews, the participant and other Cree speakers were approached to ensure that the tapes had been translated properly. In some cases, I left the Cree words in the interview and asked for further clarification and explanation at the next interview. In other cases, where it was impossible to translate word for word, I left Cree words as the main concept in the data analysis. I then asked the Cree participants, elders and Cree language speakers, to describe the meaning of these Cree words.

I found that as I transcribed and translated from Cree to English, the limitations of the English language were profound. Direct translation from Cree to English was difficult, in that the Cree language is spiritually based; therefore, all words are either animate or inanimate. There is no third person (he or she) in the Cree language, so where there was reference to a third person, I referenced the person in some cases and, in other cases, I used the pronoun he/she. Cree is also a verb-based language, while the English language is noun-based. It was impossible to translate word-for-word because embedded in the Cree words are our philosophies, values, beliefs, roles, responsibilities, and relationships. Strauss and Corbin (1990) quoted John Dewey who

stated, “It is no linguistic accident that ‘building,’ ‘construction,’ ‘work,’ designate both a process and its finished product. Without the meaning of the verb that of the noun remains blank” (p. 259).

Through the data collection phase, and on interview transcriptions as well, notes were made on a notebook. After the completion of the first transcription, I then listened to the tape-recorded interview to ensure that the typed text was accurate. Following this, all the transcripts were reviewed and coding began. From this came the data analysis. Throughout the data analysis, I asked questions of the meaning of the participants’ stories (*acimowina*), legends (*ahstayokewina*), and Cree words and their implications on my research.

An ongoing literature review during and after the data collection provided what was outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as follows: “Stimulation of theoretical sensitivity, knowledge of philosophic writings and existing theories provide ways of approaching and interpreting data, secondary sources of data, stimulate questions, direct theoretical sampling, and supplementary validation” (pp. 50-52). In other cases, I referred to the oral tradition for the teachings.

Theory of Coding

In order to find patterns and develop category systems, Guba (as cited in Patton, 1990) suggests that in focusing the analysis of qualitative data an evaluator must deal with the problem of “convergence” (p. 402). The problem of convergence is figuring out what things fit together. This leads to a classification system for the data.

Spradley (1978) said that analysis of any kind involves a way of thinking. It refers to the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole. Open coding was utilized in the initial analysis, then moved from descriptive to conceptual ideas. In the initial stage, I set out several classifications by making comparisons to address the issue of convergence. With the first interview, line by line coding was utilized. The second and group interviews required coding through concepts spoken by each of the participants at the final group interview; the entire document was compared to the other two individual interviews. In several of the interviews, I drew out the stories that were given to me. Within those stories, I also had to draw out the meaning and implications of information for my research. Another important aspect of coding was in translating Cree words to English; there were words that could not be translated and within those Cree words the beliefs were embedded. From each of the classifications, the stories and legends, and the Cree language, concepts began to emerge and categories developed.

Application of Coding

Through the axial coding method, categories were further analyzed according to their properties and dimensions. Axial coding refers to a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The initial interviews were tedious because of the amount of data. The second interview followed-up with more specific information. The final interview validated the first and second interviews and also provided additional insights. During each phase, data were further analyzed and examined for causal conditions (questioning what were

the events that led to the occurrence of the phenomenon). Properties and dimensions which formed the categories/patterns began to evolve. The pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fit together.

Finally, selective coding is the procedure which explains how major categories are integrated; and how variation is achieved in the theory by grouping categories according to their specific dimensional locations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Diagrams were used to classify and systematize the relationships that existed between categories and subcategories.

Throughout the study, I read literature relating to First Nations. In grounded theory, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that if one wants to discover relevant categories and the relationships among them, one should put together categories in new, rather than standard ways. It is important to note once again: one does not want to use literature which will cause adherence to previously developed theories. Rather, since discovery is the purpose, it is not necessary to have knowledge beforehand of all categories. But, it is only after the category has emerged that the literature will become invaluable in determining if the category is there and, if so, what do other researchers say about it?

A conditional matrix is a model that guides the data analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1990) described the conditional matrix as a complex web of interrelated conditions, actions/interactions, and consequences which pertain to a given phenomenon. Thus, this study used a conditional matrix to help identify the data.

Trustworthiness

The goal of the research was to gather information on the depth of knowledge of the values, beliefs, and philosophies as understood and lived by First Nations Cree people, and how these could be used to reshape our self-governance. What emerged from the research findings included the impacts of the colonial system on First Nations.

In providing credibility to this qualitative inquiry, Patton (1990) wrote that it is especially dependent on the credibility of the researcher because the researcher is the instrument of data collection and the center of the analytic process. Therefore, it is vital to discuss the personal and professional attributes of the researcher, in addition to the analytical process.

In regards to the experiences of the researcher, McCracken (1988) stated that self-as-instrument process works most easily when it is used simply to search out a match in one's experience for ideas and actions that the respondent has described in the interview; this was indeed applicable to this research. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explained that the researcher's awareness of the subtleties bring meaning to the data.

As a Cree-speaking First Nations researcher from the Saddle Lake community, I brought the following into the research study. Personal knowledge of the community and its members provided me with an understanding of relationships and experiences among its members. This included the impact of the colonial policies of the Canadian government on First Nations people; as an example, our residential school experience. As a practicing traditional spiritualist, I continued to participate in ceremonies within which the cultural values, stories, teachings, and traditions are embedded. I also was

able to converse in the Cree language and was able to understand the stories and the legends, and cultural subtleties were not taken for granted. These related experiences were extremely helpful when I began to transcribe, translate, code, and analyze my interviews. I had an edge: “the attributes of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42). Being a positioned subject allowed me to “develop a theory grounded, conceptually dense, and well integrated” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42).

Merriam (1988) identified how validity and reliability of a research study can be interpreted. He stated, “Validity must be assessed in terms of interpreting the investigator’s experience, rather than in terms of reality itself (which can never be grasped)” (p. 94). Reliability in the traditional sense seems to be something of a misfit when applied to qualitative research. Merriam quoted Goetz and LeCompte stating that one should establish a model category of how typical the event is, so that it can be compared with others in the same situation. Merriam believed reliability refers to the extent to which one’s findings can be replicated. However, it is important to realize that there are multiple realities emergent in the participants’ stories and the researcher’s knowledge and experience.

Equally important, my professional experience in working in First Nations communities for the last 35 years also assisted me in understanding events and actions that I saw and heard. It is important to note that the literature did not provide sufficient information specific to the First Nations culture, values, and philosophies, so I referred

to the oral traditional teachings to fill in the gaps. This served as a source of triangulation. In the other areas of research, the literature review provided a rich background of information that enhanced my understanding of what was going on with our First Nations communities. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the importance of “dependability” or “consistency” obtained from the results of the data. They stated that, given the data collected, an outsider would concur that the results make sense.

Analytical process provided insight and understanding about the phenomenon as I interacted with the data. This came from collecting, asking questions about the data, making comparisons, thinking about what I saw, and developing small theoretical frameworks about concepts and their relationships. One idea or insight sparked another, directing me to look more closely at the data as I transcribed, translated, coded, and analyzed the data. As part of the analytical process I continually worked with the Cree speaking participants, asking them to make any changes to the transcriptions and translations after each interview. This provided them an opportunity to direct the researcher, and to ensure the participants’ statements and descriptions of their life experiences were truly represented in the transcriptions and translations. To ensure that the intent of the story was not lost in translation, a copy of Chapter Four was given to the Cree speakers for their review. For instance, the tepee teaching which is an oral account of women’s roles in society is presented and written English, in Chapter Four. This increasing sensitivity to concepts, their meanings, and relationships was important to the interweaving of data selection with data analysis.

In addition, Merriam (1988) said that if the researcher has similar experiences to the participants, and is of the same ethnic background, the meaning of the experience is understood and validated.

The emphasis of the grounded theory method is that theory must come from the data collected, and not prior assumptions. The validity and reliability are dependent on the process, which leads to the theoretical conceptions. Robrecht (1995) paraphrased Schatzman, who felt that the perspective of analytic thinking focuses on events in the natural setting where interactions occur between human beings. The aim of analysis is to discover the meanings of those interactions as they create the observed situation, rather than the discovery of basic social processes. Several methods of analytical process were utilized. This included working with a committee of colleagues who directed me to relevant literature and oral traditional teachings, and assisted me in my interpretations of the data to ensure its consistency and reliability.

Finally, in the attempt to make the study dependable and consistent, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that, "what is required is to provide a rich, thick description so that anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information appropriate to the judgement" (p. 124). Thus, the findings presented in Chapter Four include a rich description of the participants' knowledge, experience, and identity in relation to the research question.

Limitations of the Study

There are numerous First Nations issues; however, this study was limited to seeking knowledge that addressed the visions of the First Nations communities and

what their leadership perceives as crucial in addressing their challenges. Presently, First Nations leaders are focusing their efforts in the healing processes of their communities, resulting from the hundreds of years of oppression. Additionally, they are challenging the government to recognize and honor the Treaties as they understand them from an oral perspective. And finally, through thoughtful dialoguing on self-governance models, First Nations will reclaim the power to control their own destinies.

This research study was specific to the Cree beliefs, values, and philosophies of the Cree First Nations, therefore, requiring a Cree-speaking community member to do the research. Henderson, Sampsele, Mayes, and Oakley (1992) framed the discussion within a new understanding of culturally sensitive research, stating we enumerate the specific dangers to validity and generalizability of applying research methods developed in a dominant culture to other cultures. They further highlighted the fact that ethnocentrism from the mainstream society's experience is "the belief that our own [Euro-Canadian] culture is normative, is deeply embedded in our [Euro-Canadian] assumptions It is even more difficult to act on the understanding that other cultures' beliefs, values, and behaviors are of equal value" (p. 341).

Another limitation of the study is that the translation was difficult, in that there are many concepts in Cree that cannot be translated directly. Therefore, the feeling and intent of what is expressed becomes lost in the translation. Several of the participants in this study chose to speak in Cree to fully express the ideas, concepts, and substance that are central to their world view. The study required a Cree language speaker who

had the understanding of the language and was able to transcribe the Cree into Roman Orthography before it was translated to English.

This study was limited to seven First Nations members, four men and three women. It was limited to a few in number to ensure that there was depth to the interviews. It was critical to have knowledge of First Nations members with this information and experience. This is where the positioned subject variable was imperative.

Finally, current literature on the world view from the First Nations perspective is limited; therefore, First Nations oral traditional teachings were accessed. As a Cree woman, I was fortunate in knowing the people who were willing to provide me with this information. These oral traditional teachings were crucial to the validation of the study.

Summary

First Nations communities are distrustful of research models developed and implemented by the Euro-North American society. At the same time, First Nations people express an interest in finding more about themselves. Their philosophy of doing things for themselves can be implemented with their own researcher, and theory evolving from themselves. Smith, Willms, and Johnson (1997) cited an example of this in the following paragraph:

In Latin America, during the 1970's, Paulo Friere was writing about "thematic investigation," a new way to do social research, which he described in his classic *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Many researchers in Tanzania, elsewhere

in Africa, and in other parts of the former colonial world were beginning to object to the epistemological assumptions in much of the dominant research methodology of the day. Research that started with an idea in the head of a university-based or outside researcher, and that has as its goal the discovery of information about “others,” began to feel contradictory to the goals of increased participation and democracy being called for on the political front. (p. xiv)

The grounded theory approach complements the values of First Nations people, as it provides for direct participation. In their journey towards self-governance, they will act on their knowledge and what is important for the survival of their community. A Tewa author, Cajete, (1994) promoted the belief that: “A value many Indian people share is that their stories, languages, customs, songs, dances, and ways of thinking and learning must be preserved because they sustain the life of the individual, family, and community” (p. 41).

The following chapter reveals the results and findings from the participants and forms the grounded theory in this study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The data collected through interviews with the participants shall be presented in this chapter. The participants supplied the researcher with a richness of wisdom gained from their experiences as leaders, teachers, and carriers of the ancestral knowledge of the Cree. The data also reveal the state of life today on the reserve and its meaning in the broader context of colonial history. Finally, the participants have extolled their faith in the future and the essential requirements that are necessary to bring about desired change in the community. Using grounded theory methodology, this chapter reports the following data findings: the Cree world view, the impacts of the colonial relationship, and community development. Using the voices of the seven participants of this study (Mike, Skywoman, Charles, Vincent, Bernie, Florence, and Cherrilene), the themes will be described in order to develop the theoretical constructs of this study entitled "Teachings From Cree Elders: A Grounded Theory Study of Indigenous Leadership."

As a Cree thinker, establishing kinship ties is an essential first step in any meeting. For members of mainstream society, it should be noted that kinship titles have a deeper meaning in Cree than in English. Traditionally, all members called each

other by how they were related rather than by name. They were related by blood ties, marriage, or adoption. The researcher has kinship ties to all the participants in this study. Mike, 68 years old, is currently employed as an elder/teacher/mentor/counselor in a First Nations College. He received his mainstream education at Blue Quills Residential School and Alberta College. He has many years of mentoring with various elders from the United States and Canada. He occupied key positions in many cultural and political organizations. He served as the executive director of a First Nations provincial political organization, Indian Association of Alberta, and a First Nations owned school, Blue Quills Native Education Center, and was elected for a term as a Band Councillor for Saddle Lake First Nations. He has owned and operated a variety of business ventures. He hosts many different Cree ceremonies; he is currently well respected as a teacher in that field.

Skywoman is 64 years old. She was born into the most traditional family in Saddle Lake First Nations and received as part of her upbringing the teachings from her ancestral line. Her mainstream education was through a residential school and she was one of the first students to experience the government's forced integration policy. She had the opportunity to go the university route but instead chose to follow the footsteps of her mother. In this generation, she embodies the collective knowledge of her ancestors. Her mother continued the ceremonies in a clandestine manner during the period when spiritual ceremonies were outlawed by the Canadian government. She plays a humble role in public life. She has a great capacity as a transformational leader, which she exercises at a family and personal level.

Charles is 62 years old. He received his formal education from Blue Quills Residential School, then his post secondary-education in Business Administration at Alberta College. He has been in the First Nations political arena for many years. He was involved with the Indian Association of Alberta, was Chief, and also served several terms as a councillor of Saddle Lake First Nations. He worked as an administrator for the First Nations and the government at the National level. He was raised by his grandparents, who were very traditional and taught him the Cree work ethic, whereby everything was done collectively and everyone shared. He is a visionary leader in the areas of economic development and political organizations.

Bernie is 49 years old. He started his formal education in a provincial school, then later attended a residential school. He received his post-secondary education from Northern Alberta Institute of Technology and the University of Calgary. He spent many years mentoring with various elders. He has learned to blend traditional knowledge with alternatives to the mainstream thinkers from other cultures, always using the Cree worldview as a foundation. His command of English expresses his cosmopolitan point of view. He has a broad knowledge of his own Cree language and culture, as well as western and other cultures. He is also a practicing ceremonial holder. He is able to bring people together to develop a consensual agreement and has a gift for public speaking to express that consensual agreement.

Cherrilene is 45 years old. Cherrilene's grandfather Lloyd Cardinal was a gifted linguist and ceremonial holder, most prominently the Sun Dance, who passed his fluency in the Cree language and Nehiyawowin (Creeness) to his children and

grandchildren. Cherrilene received her elementary and secondary education in the provincial school system. She attended Alberta Vocational College to receive her certification as a Community Health Representative. She worked as a C.H.R. in her community for many years before she made the decision to become politically active; since then she has served as a Chief and a council member for the Saddle Lake First Nations. She brings her passion to a modern understanding of the Treaty between our First Nations and the government of Canada.

Florence is 45 years old. She attended a reserve day school from grades 1 through 5, then went to provincial school to complete her junior and high school. She later went to the University of Alberta to complete two degrees: Bachelor of Education, majoring in language; and a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in political science. She has taught for many years and became the Vice Principal of an Elementary School and then Principal of a High School at Saddle Lake First Nations. She is presently enrolled in a Master's Program— Special Education at the University of British Columbia. She follows the traditional ceremonial path which is the foundation of her administrative activities. Cree is her first language, and she comes from a home where her parents demonstrated the equal importance of their roles.

Vincent, 33 years old, was one of the first students who attended Blue Quills Native Education Center when it was taken over by First Nations of northeast Alberta. He is enrolled in a Bachelor of Physical Education program at the University of Alberta. Vincent was one of the first community members to be influenced by the critical shift that occurred after 1970. The critical shift was the dawning of the

understanding of colonization. The first step towards this movement was personal empowerment, where Vincent was given the opportunity to live in Cree cultural revival camps. At the same time, he is a member of the first generation who are not fluent Cree speakers, and for whom Cree is the second language. He carries Creeness in an intuitive form, most noticeably in ceremonial activities.

As a positioned subject, the researcher was able to chose these seven participants out of a population of 6,500. The seven participants all were engaged in leadership activities at the start of this study.

Cree World View

(Eysisikanawapahtamihk Iyiniwaskiy)

The Cree world view is clearly distinctive and is ordered in a circular pattern of interrelated parts, the whole being the sum of these parts that is circular. Any effort to present the findings in a linear order is thus contrary to the nature of the Cree world view. However, several authors authentically presented the world views of Indigenous Nations in various parts of North America. It is the voice of the people represented in this study that make the pattern fit the medium of a scholarly study. The data findings start with a definition of the term “world view” in order to set the pattern for the following discourse. The subthemes based on the arrangement of the Cree world view include a steady flow of thoughts on the centrality of the Creator, beliefs/values/laws, Turtle Teachings, ceremonies, elements, oral tradition, and governance. It is significant to note at the outset that each of these subtheme titles is presented in English and

Cree. The Cree language allows for expressions of the heart in more vivid detail than the English language.

In the literature of cultural anthropologists, Robert Redfield (as quoted by Hallowell in Tedlock & Tedlock, 1982) supplied the following perspective on this matter:

“World view” differs from culture, ethos, mode of thought, and national character. It is the picture the members of a society have of the properties and characters upon their stage of action. While “national character” refers to the way these people look to the outsider looking in on them, “world view” refers to the way the world looks to that people looking out. Of all that is connoted by “culture,” “world view” attends especially to the way a man, in a particular society, sees himself in relation to all else. It is the properties of existence as distinguished from and related to the self. It is, in short, a man’s idea of the universe. It is that organization of ideas which answers to a man the questions: Where am I? Among what do I move? What are my relations to these things? . . . Self is the axis of “world view.” (p. 142)

This way of approaching world view is befitting to the participants in this study. They continuously ask the questions in an inclusive nature because this is the structure and order of the Cree language. It is inclusive of self and others, as Skywoman urges us to consider, “Who are we? What is the purpose of why we are here? If you are going to accomplish anything as a First Nation, do not ever separate yourself from who you are.”

The Cree world view is intrinsically and extrinsically shaped by the members of the Cree society and their relationship to self, others, the environment, and the cosmos. It is considerate of all things that have been created and given to the Cree by the Creator. The Cree people have to completely understand the way of life given to them. In finding the spirituality of self, one also develops the bonds to nature. Human beings are of the natural world and are related to the animals, plants, and all of creation. It is a Cree belief that by observing the habits and characteristics of the animals, lessons are learned. To understand this statement, consider Vincent, a participant of the study who observed, "It is just more integrity to be who you are. It is like a bear. That Creator makes the bear and that bear speaks the same language and does the things of a bear, his whole life." Vincent is illustrating the importance of maintaining integrity to your birthright; since animals follow a natural path, never straying from their fold, so too must the Cree person. He further declared, "The Creator makes the *newo iyiniw* person, and all of a sudden, this *newo iyiniw* person is a European person and not a Native anymore."

It is this phenomenon of straying from the original intent of the Creator that distinguishes human beings, through the use of the mind, from other beings of nature. According to the Cree world view, it is in each individual to seek out and understand the truth of his/her existence. The answers to the questions posed by Skywoman are found embedded deep within ourselves, and the journey starts from the mind to the heart. Once the answers are revealed through a journey of introspection, then each individual can become responsible and serve his/her fellow human beings and the land.

Thus, the Cree world view claims as its base and its future direction, the spirituality of the Creator, inclusive of all beings both in the seen and unseen world.

Reference has been made to the way in which the Cree distinguish themselves from other First Nations people, as *newo iyyinew*. Skywoman supplied the background of this term:

We are called *iyiniwak*. That is the foundation of who we are, our identity. We are supposed to heal ourselves and others and *iyiniwaskamkaw*, that is our relationship to our land, our connection here. *Nehiyaw* is the four directions, *newoyak*. There are four parts, and those are our four directions, and that is in our language.” Additionally, ‘*Newoyak ehoci pikisweyan.*’ I speak from the four directions, so you are always honoring your four directions. That is the philosophy of it. The four directions are, we have to be caring, sharing, we have to be honest, and we have to pray daily for our strength. Continued strength of our people and our land — our very existence. Yes, we are part of the land. That is how our connection is to the land, we are *iyiniwak*.

Iyiniwaskamkohk, you hear those terms when the Elders speak to all of you. It means it is a healing land, the land itself, they call Turtle Island and the turtle is part of healing. That is all [encompassing], it is almost like spiritual direction, you are honoring that direction.

Furthermore, Skywoman spoke to the question of identity, “Once you fully understand, it is like someone is drawing you a picture, or putting a puzzle together. These are the

years and years of teachings; finally, now I have it straight. It takes a long time to learn. We truly believe that the Creator put us on this earth for a purpose.”

Our Creator

(Mamawi-Kohtawiynaw)

Each of the participants presented his/her understanding of the link between purpose and creation. *Mamawi* means collectively and *kohtawiynaw* means our father. The term *mamawi kohtawiynaw* refers to Our Creator. Skywoman noted the following legend related to Our Creator:

When there was no sky, people were crying because the Creator was visible. They depended too much on the Creator for what they could have done for themselves. He put a blanket up, the sky. He left a hole in the middle. The Sundance pole is the symbol of the doorway to the Creator. He gave laws and said, “Now you must find your way. If you follow them [Laws], you will never go wrong.” The Creator reminded us that we would need him daily. Daily we express wants, but we must ask for guidance. Just ask once through prayer. If we acknowledge the Creator and pray in the morning we have already planned our direction and at night pray again to give thanks for that day.

When the Creator first created the world, the first plant was tobacco. In ceremonies we have the pipe. . . . Any time the pipe is brought to the bowl, you have the four directions. The four directions [*newoyak*] means you have to be honest, care, share, and strength is the prayer. You have to be like the rock, pipe bowl, to carry on no matter what. If you are honest, pray everyday, then,

you can make it. But you still need your fire and tobacco. To be a pipe carrier, you have to be humble to be these things.”

Mike stated, “Our Creator gave us a purpose, we have a real purpose to serve in this world. He left us to be the doorkeepers of the world. We have not been doing our job. It is there in our minds, [though] we are not doing it. But, we are slowly getting there.”

“I thank the Creator for giving me this day and pray that I will be loving, kind, and gentle to those people that I meet,” said Florence. “What I feel happens is that I have not separated my life, my work, my spirituality, they are all there together.”

As Vincent put it, “I feel that our culture is made by the Creator. We are born with spirit, and we learn how to pray. Our first prayer is the cry. I am a parent now; when my child cries, I respond. And now in the lodge, I cry or whenever people cry, the Creator responds. He sends his help.”

Mike explained the following value teaching:

The first law that Dave Courchene talks about is that all of us come here from the Creator, and we all come here with a gift and a purpose. When we come here, we almost plead and beg to be here, and we have this experience because we are all spiritual beings. One of the first reasons we come here is that we are going to love, we are going to love each other. That is the Creator’s first Law, to love ourselves so that we can love each other.

Bernie added: “Creator was first, the leader of all leaders. We respected his Creation, Mother Earth, birds, and animals.” “Our forefathers, this is their land, they were

gifted to this land, the Creator created us to this land so that we could live in harmony with the land. This is our connectedness, it is our value system. We are like a grain of sand, we are just that small in the eyes of the Creator,” explained Skywoman. Charles concluded this subject by expressing his Cree belief:

In our religion, we believe that there is only one God and that one God is all loving, all forgiving, and even to the point that we are never alone. The Creator is always with us, even when we think that we are alone, we are never alone. I always take the time to thank the Creator for the many gifts. . . . I have always maintained that the Creator has given us everything by which to lead a happy, healthy, and fruitful life.

The following section addresses the beliefs, values and laws as given to the Cree people by Our Creator.

Beliefs, Values, Laws

(Tapiwakeyiktamowina, Ispiteyhtakosowina, Wiyasowewina)

This theme begins with the literal translation of the Cree words to highlight the meaning of each part of the word. The word *tahpiwkeytamowina* (beliefs) is derived from the word *tahpwe* which means “the truth.” *Tapiwkeyta* means “to believe.” *Tahpiwkeytamowina* are the set of beliefs that one believes to be the truth. In translating the second word *ispiteyhtakosowina* (values), the preverb, *ispi*, means something higher than or above, it is a degree of comparison. *Teyihta* refers to one’s thought; *mowina* refers to a collection of ideas. The ending *wina* is a nominal ending which makes the word a noun. Therefore, *ispiteyhtakosowina* refers to the values that are

thought to be at the highest level. As for the third word, *wiyasowe* means “a meeting”; *wewina* is “the collection of ideas.” Therefore, the term *wiyasowewina* are (laws) derived as a result of people gathering and sharing their ideas at this meeting. Bernie referred to the importance of beliefs in the First Nations communities. He said, “Our elders had a philosophy that we as First Nations were guided to think and believe. When we think and believe, we create. What we create, we become.”

“Belief in the Creator and the spirit world that is guiding and helping us. That is what makes us a strong people,” Vincent stated. Each of the participants referred to the value teachings that are common to the Cree people. Skywoman and Bernie referred to these as the “Four Directions.” Mike called these the “Four Cornerstones.” Florence named these the “Medicine Wheel” teachings (Figure 1). All agree that these teachings are from the Creator. Skywoman said, “The Creator gave us laws thousands of years ago, and they are still the same. We have not changed even one.” This is also referred to as the Natural Laws.

Natural Laws (*Iyintoweyasowewina*)

All the participants referred to the Natural Laws as love/kindness, honesty, sharing, and determination/strength. The definition of *iyintoweyasowewina* is derived from the root word, *Iyinto* means natural or common, and laws, *wiyasowewina*, was described in the above section.

Love/Kindness — *Kiseywatisowin*

Mike said, “He made laws. The law of love first.” Skywoman confirmed this in her statement, “We have a set of laws from the Creator that were given to us when

we were put on this land. We haven't changed those laws; they may be a bit weak because we haven't done the whole potential of what they are supposed to be.

[However], you have to be humble, that is the first law."

Even though this statement appears to contradict Mike's statement about love being the first law, she elaborated on her understanding of humility, "You can never be humble if you are not kind." In Cree, "kiseyiwatisowin" means the spirit of kindness and generosity. Kindness precedes love and humility cradles both of these dispositions." Using the metaphor of the grass, Skywoman explained:

You have to know from the grassroot. The term refers to the life path and from where you start. You have to be a part of the grass to be a grassroots person, [to have] Indian understanding, respect, thought, [and] responsibility of the sacredness of life itself. You have to be, above all, even [level] with the knowledge and power. You have to be even with the ground and not like the blade itself that dances with the wind. Grassroot is the people of the soil,

Figure 1. Natural laws on the medicine wheel.

people of the land. Before you can be humble, you have to be kind. You feel with your heart, and not your mind. It takes a real balance before you can get that. Everything is in balance because we care about each other.

In discussing this law of kindness, Bernie expounded, “an Elder, we say ‘*kiseyak*’ (*kiseyiniw*, singular) means a humble one, one that gave us answers, one that guides us, one that shapes us into a human being.” Furthermore, Bernie stated that, “kindness [is] represented by sweetgrass, kindness represents mother earth.” In the late summer, sweetgrass which grows in the prairies, is picked ceremonially and is kept in a three strand braid. Mike explained the importance of sweetgrass:

The Creator gave us sweetgrass for ceremonial purposes. He gave it to us because it is kind and gentle. When you light it, and smudge yourself with it, it will never make you cry, whereas, other kinds of grasses will make you cry. When you smudge with the sweetgrass, you will find that it calms you. Even when a person is very angry, and they smudge with the sweetgrass, it calms and balances them. My grandfather told me that “in the Cree society, everything is done in fours, we are *newo iyiniwak*, even if there are three strands braided into the sweetgrass, the fourth is you. You are a part of the sweetgrass, *wiykask*.”

Skywoman related:

Now I think they even used that, *kihcetwewin* [highest level of promise and commitment]. The old people used to say, *kihcetwewin*, because when you pick up your sweet grass, you do not burn that sweetgrass without knowing what it means and what you are supposed to be like. You are supposed to be kind.

That is what it means. *Epetamahkosiyahk eko kistanaw* (we were given that by our Creator), to be kind to each other, to share with the sweetgrass. If I was to take my sweetgrass and say what it means, then I have to swear on my birth right to it. It is a total commitment.

Honesty — *Kweyaskatesowin*

The second teaching from the Creator is about honesty, *kweyaskwatesowin*. *Kweyask* is the root word and refers to being aligned and straight. *Itatisowin* is the verb and implies characteristics or a trait of being in life. “Honesty is a hard, a hard thing to follow all the way, every step of your life. Sometimes, when you are a little bit dishonest in your step, you will save yourself a lot of work. But, still you are not being honest. Again, when you have that honesty, you only can be honest with yourself,” stated Mike. “The pipe teaches us that the stem is straight so they talk about honesty, the tree from which the pipe stem is made represents honesty,” added Bernie.

Sharing — *Wicihtowin*

The third teaching is about sharing; the Cree word is “*wicihtowin*.” This stems from the verb, *wicih*, to help; and “*towin*” makes the root word into a noun and refers to having everybody involved. Charles reflected on this teaching as a part of his childhood memories:

When I was very young, I used to remember our people coming together, working together to address whatever it was that needed to be addressed at a given time. They used the time very effectively, I thought. As an example, in the fall, in preparation for winter, certain groups of families got together and

they harvested their feed for their livestock. The woman gathered berries, and so on. The men went hunting and, as family units, worked together to prepare their homes, mud plastering, and so on. In a sense, those were happy memories for me because I saw our people working together. They did not place any value on getting any material gain; rather, they were there to help each other, preparing for the times ahead. And, they did it collectively. Why I said the happy times for myself, the people were happy. They spoke with one another. They laughed with one another. They shared all these wonderful things together, and they were able to accomplish what it is they set out to do.

Skywoman added her knowledge and experience of the value of sharing in her community:

Saddle Lake community still share, they still carry on that tradition. Everybody shared. They shared in every scope of life that they could help each other. That is the spirit of sharing, collectively. A long time ago, when a person was disabled and could not care for themselves and an Elder and a child, they were all a community's responsibility. They would be helped. Even a couple with many children who were too busy around their home fire, they could not get anything for themselves. The whole community would gather supplies and would assist them for winter preparation. That was giving of your time, that was sharing.

To understand the world of work on the reserve back in the past to help each other in reciprocity and in the spirit of the gift. The community in my

time, shared, truly shared. At the end of the day no one said, “you owe me.”

Instead, at the end of the day, there was celebration. That time, you could use the word community, the way they cared about each other and shared everything. That was how it was in my community, Saddle Lake. *Wehtohkanak*, we are. (*Wehtohkanak* refers to a family clan from Saddle Lake First Nations.)

One of those people will give you the last thing off their back. They are real givers. It was part of their exchange system. It was a bartering system. It’s the whole concept of, “I don’t own anything, not my life nor my children. I’m just living on borrowed time, borrowed land.”

Bernie explained his understanding of this teaching and the importance of the buffalo as a symbol of this value. He said:

The most important factor is that in order to live, we have to depend on the animals for our survival. In our teachings about sharing, our grandfathers would tell us that the buffalo represented the concept of sharing. The buffalo gave up its life so that we could have food, medicine, clothing, and shelter.

This is the ultimate in sharing.

Strength — *Sohkisowin*

The fourth value is strength, *sohkisowin*. It refers to strength and determination in the body, and *sohkeyihtamowin* is the strength of the mind as reflected in the following comments. Skywoman used the analogy of the strength of the rock. She stated, “You almost have to be like a stone, to have the strength, to sit and sit there in your belief.” Florence said, “I try to be strong to be an Indian person with the beliefs.

So everyday, that is all I can do, to use these values and belief systems to guide me through the day." Vincent's strength flows from this belief, "It's like standing on a rock. And that rock is our culture. It is like being stubborn. The grandfather that is stubborn, I think that is the rock." Skywoman stated, "A person that is strong is *esiyipisit*, determined and strong. One that is committed to serving their people rather than themselves." Bernie's understanding is that "the rock talks about strength and determination." Skywoman advised, "Pray daily for the strength of our people and our land, our very existence." Finally, Vincent believes that, "Prayer, prayer is like hope. Without prayer, and without the guidance of our Elders, then I don't think we would be a people anymore."

Turtle Teachings

(Miskinak Okiskinohamakewina)

The teachings of the turtle are fundamental to the Cree (Figure 2). These are embedded in the Sweat lodge ceremonies. Mike briefly explained the meaning of these teachings in the following:

Before the sun rose, the turtle existed. It was huge then but generally they are small now. The turtle is the oldest of all animals. The turtle was given *maskawisiywen* "strength," that is why some people have Turtle Sweat Lodges. This turtle is kind and is a healer. Another important factor about the turtle is that it does not sway from its path, nothing stops it, it keeps on the same path and stays in balance. That is one of teachings of the turtle, it teaches us to be honest. We should always honor what we say we are doing. We should always

be honest with ourselves and others. The turtle (*emamahtawisit*) works in mysterious ways and is sacred.

Miskinak is a turtle, and *kiskinoha* means to show, model or map out, and is used for either learning or teaching in Cree. The English translation is teaching. The word

Figure 2. Turtle teachings.

maskanahk means a path or a road which is derived from the word turtle, *miskinak*.

Skywoman explained the difficulty of staying on the Natural Laws path. In addition, she referred to the difficulty in passing the bundle of sacred knowledge because that person, too, should follow the Sacred Path of the Turtle. She elaborated further in the following:

It's harder today than yesterday to be in balance. When you have those [sacred teachings] you have to help the people who have nothing because these people are struggling. You have to give up your life for others. You have to be poor. You cannot depend on this sacred knowledge to promote yourself for more power. You have to be equal to others. There is a fine line in balancing your

life. Yesterday or today, we can use all the old laws, we can revive them now. That life value [teaching] is your responsibility to bring to the next generation. But, you have to find someone that you can trust, who is humble, and who is responsible. Your life's work is to find that person to whom you will give those bundle of laws. It is like finding a new blade of grass to continue that bundle of knowledge, life, and spirituality. The continuance of that traditional knowledge and the spirituality must pass from one holder to the next. Your life's work is to find the one to pass it [the traditional and spiritual knowledge] on for its survival. You have only a short time to live.

Life is sacred. Without all four [directions], we would not be living. If you do not practice your culture, you are actually refusing these essentials to your Cree life. These are a requirement in order to live. It is simple to understand. It is the first thing you think about when you get up and the last thing to think about at night. Greet the Creator and give thanks for the chance to live. Greet the night and give thanks for the day and hope for tomorrow. If all of us did this simple thing, we would get stronger. We are ill, yet we are the healers. We have suffered greatly over the years but must continue to find something good in it. We have that little extra kick. No matter what, we can get up and try again. We have to reach our destination no matter what. We cannot give up. We will get the spirit and the blessing to get up. We will get the guidance and the lift will come to you so that you may continue to move on your road. As you move on this path, you will see others who will require your help. The

old people wanted us to continue what they believed in. They did not want us to leave it behind or have it replaced by something else.

When you can humble yourself and ask the Creator and the Spirit World to help you in your troubles, and to pray all the time to get direction, you then can feel good about yourself.

Skywoman explained the meaning of spiritual clans in the following, she said:

First, we are all born with a spirit, and it does not necessarily have to be the same as either of our parents. Your spirit is more or less predetermined before you enter into this world. . . . We are all born with a gift or gifts that will help you in your journey in this world. . . . To carry on you have to give up your whole life.

She further addressed how the community was able to work with the children and guide them to use their gifts and acknowledge their purpose in life. She explained, "When you were small, the old ones told each one [child] their responsibility. They had the knowledge. . . . In the family unit, this is where it all begins, and then we go out to make a bigger circle."

Ceremonies (*Isihtwawina*)

The root word of "ceremonies" is *isihycike*, which means to organize or arrange. *Win* makes the word a noun. The ending "*a*" pluralizes the word. Ceremonies are the heart of the Cree culture. There are ceremonies for every aspect of the Cree way of life. They provide a structure for the community, and they are grounded in the story-telling tradition. "Every one of the ceremonies has a story to it," Mike

said. The participants referred to some of these ceremonies and their stories. In all of these ceremonies, there are starting points and critical elements.

Pipe Ceremony — *Epihtwawnikek*

Pipe ceremonies are of great significance in the Cree culture. The participants offered the following knowledge on the meaning of the pipe and pipe ceremonies.

Every ceremony starts with the offering of the pipe. Mike further elaborated on this:

The offering of the pipe ceremony is another teaching story. The Creator had promised so long as he [First Nations person] practiced the ceremony, there would be peace in his land. This country we call Turtle Island belongs to the bear. The bear spirit promised that there would never be a war on his land so long as the Old man carried out this ceremony. Therefore, it is believed that in order to have peace in our country and for our people, we continue this ceremony. When we perform or attend a pipe ceremony we go there to ensure that we have peace.

Bernie explained his understanding about the meaning of the pipe and how it also is a symbol of the values found in the Natural Laws:

The stem is straight so they talk about the honesty, and of course there is a rock, they talk about strength and determination. They talk about food, sharing.

They talk about sweet grass, kindness that represents Mother Earth.

Furthermore, Skywoman stated there are rules, procedures and protocols associated with the carrying of the pipe and responsibility for the pipe during the pipe ceremony.

In ceremonies we do the pipe. The grandmothers [Spirit helpers] around us help to take care of our responsibility. In the north, there is one [Spirit helper] that is the hunter, she takes care of the ones who go out hunting. They have this bundle for the men who go out and hunt so as to provide a living. The grandmother [Spirit helpers] takes care of the woman of the lodge to not talk beyond the power of the bundle. It is a big responsibility. When there is a problem you think of the Creator and ask for help from the bundle. As a bundle keeper, the woman cannot ask for that help, the husband or son, the man [of the lodge] must ask for help.

Hence, women had the responsibility of looking after the pipe and bundles in their lodges while the men performed their roles of hunting. While women maintained the safe keeping of the pipe, they were not allowed to speak and ask for direct help that was needed to sustain the family. The men in the family retained the responsibility to offer the prayers on behalf of the family as guided by the women's instructions.

Thus, the role of the pipe and pipe ceremonies was and still is of great significance in the Cree community.

Give Away Ceremony — *Emahtaytohk*

In a society where hunting and gathering were the main economic activities to sustain life, it follows that there would be ritualized ceremonies performed to protect the hunters and ensure success in this activity. As a result, there were certain times of the year that ceremonies were performed accordingly. For example, in the winter, when food was more difficult to obtain, ceremonies were performed for the sustenance

of families. One such ceremony is known as the Give Away Dance. This Cree ceremony performed in the fall was devoted to the hunt. During the Give Away ceremony, emphasis is placed on the importance of a successful hunt. As an Elder and a host of this ceremony, Mike described the significance and importance of the Give Away ceremony as follows:

During a very harsh winter, a camp found themselves unable to find any source of food. All men took turns going out to hunt, but were not successful. The situation in the camp was getting very serious, and without food all the members would starve. Finally, as a last resort, one of the hunters decided he would venture out on his own. When the hunter had been out in the woods for many days, and unable to find any animals, he spent an evening just sitting by the fire and thinking of his dilemma when he noticed a little skinny man sitting just outside of his circle. He tried to befriend this little skinny man but was unable to. During the night when the Skinny man thought the hunter was asleep he crept up to him. Very quickly the man captured the Skinny Man. This Skinny Man is really fearful of anything that a woman touched. The hunter had tied Skinny Man up with a woman's legging. The Skinny Man was helpless, so he began to beg and plead with the hunter to let him go. He promised the hunter a ceremony that would assist him in his hunt if he was freed. The hunter decided that he would free the Skinny Man. In return the Skinny Man taught him songs, he taught him to use the pipe. The hunter was taught all the procedures of this ceremony. He was told that if anyone is to practice it, that also is life giving.

The hunters use the songs that were given. This ceremony is where the hunter was given the life of the animal in order for his tribe to survive. In order to give thanks for the gifts that Cree people receive during the year, this is a ceremony where they bring gifts to share with other people attending the ceremony.

The Give Away ceremony is conducted each year by the Cree people and continues on even to this day. It continues with its focus on providing the necessities to live a prosperous life, with enough food to carry families through each winter.

Vincent shared the spiritual importance of the Give Away ceremony to his family:

We give away freely some things we value. I try to give away one thing of value every year. I give that away. I feel better. I know that I am going to get something back, something in my life that I will value just as much. It is not that I do it because of that, I do it for life. Life for my family.

Thus, Vincent's sharing demonstrates the importance of the ceremony itself, as well as living the Natural Laws, more specifically the Law related to sharing.

Chicken Dance Ceremony — *Pihewsimowin*

Another ceremony that is central to the hunt is the Chicken Dance. The Chicken Dance is more commonly performed in the warmer months between spring and fall. Again, there is a story behind the ceremony. Mike provided the following synopsis of the story:

This Chicken Dance ceremony derives its origin from the time a man was out hunting because the tribe was going hungry. He heard a prairie chicken making movement on the other side of the hill. The hunter silently crept up on the prairie chicken that “looks out for others,” the one that always walks around, keeping his eyes open while the other prairie chickens are in a daze. If you kill the main prairie chicken that is watching out for the rest, you can almost go there and ring their necks — they do not know what is happening, as the prairie chickens are in a daze. The role of the observer prairie chicken is to keep them safe. This observer prairie chicken became aware of this hunter, so he came over to talk to the hunter. He said to him, “Some of my companions will give you their lives so that you can live. We know that your people are going to starve. You are going to run short of everything. You see, he said to the hunter, my friends, the other prairie chickens are presently giving thanks. They dance each year in the fall but usually in the spring. They give thanks for the life they were given, and they also know that they do not have any control over their lives. They also know they will help you by providing their lives to you, as they are for the taking.” He (prairie chicken) said, “You can take our lives, feast on us so you can have life from us. If you do this dance that I am going to show you, you will receive life through this ceremony and the songs. When you sing the songs, we will be there. Even at times when you go get the tree for the ceremony we will be there, the prairie chicken promised.” Thus, the Chicken Dance Ceremony gives life. When you attend this ceremony, you can

also bring gifts to show your appreciation for what you have and sharing some of your good fortune with others. This is the Chicken Dance story.

Mike stated that he has been involved in hosting many ceremonies. His experience has been that, "When our people begin to look at themselves, and acknowledge they need help, this is when the ceremonies are useful because the people understand what the ceremonies stand for."

Elements: Air, Water, Fire, and Land

(Yotin, Nipiy, Iskotew, Askiy)

Air, water, fire and land are sacred elements to the Cree, as they represent life. The Creator gives life. The Creator is life force energy. It is spirit. In the Cree world view, The Creator is the giver of life through the four elements (Figure 3). *Yotin* refers to the wind or air. *Kiseynapewyotin*, is the Grandfather Wind, who sits in the northerly direction of the circle. Wind has the responsibility of bringing about change through its very movement. Wind is air, and in people, it is breath. Breath is an extension of the life force energy, air spirit. Breath powers voice and, therefore, it is sacred. The

Figure 3. Spiritual directions teachings.

Creator placed the sun in the sky to radiate light and heat. Fire, one of the elements represents the sun. The people use fire for many different purposes. Of the four elements, fire is a spirit that represents respect. Water, *nipiy*, is essential to life. Everyday, people need to replenish the water that the body normally expends in daily activities. Water is an element that represents the continuity of life. In the spirit world, the water comes from the sky and is kept by the Thunder Beings. Finally, the earth, *askiy*, is a spiritual entity that is revered for its ability to sustain life. The bear, *newokahtewiyisiyin*, embodies the land. The Creator placed these four elements in the physical world to sustain and manifest continuity of life.

Using the wisdom of this teaching, people can get clear messages about where an imbalance may be present in their lives. Then attention to the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and voice will be present. It is meant to assist people to stay in balance with the forces of life and to be grateful for the Creator's gifts. The sacred relationship between the Cree and the natural elements are evident in the following statements.

Skywoman explained:

The Creator said as long as we practice *kakiysimowin* (prayer), the ceremonies will keep the country together because we are still maintaining the four directions with the sun, thunder, bear, and wind. We have not changed our ceremonies much. It is very important that we keep it from east to west. The old people say "learn your own culture and not the cultures north and south." That is why we did not go to war; because we are kind, healing people. *Iyiniwak*, I

am a healer, I am not a fighter. The mountains and the eagle are in the west. The bear is in the east. The buffalo is in the center. The Cree people are still practicing their invisible clan system. The people in the west are keeping Canada together because they really understood the law.

Florence stated, "I value my relationship with the Creator first of all, the most important of all, and then my relationship with the land and to the life everyday, the values that I have: the value of love, love in myself and others, the earth, the plants, the trees, and the sharing and helping. I think I try to be strong to be an Indian person." In this statement, Florence captures the whole essence of this section. The relationship that the Cree people have to the land is symbiotic. The earth is a living being. A mother to all living beings is created by the Creator. Each of the participants agreed on these aspects of the meaning of the land. Hence, the land sustains all life forms including plants, animals, and humans. Thus, humanity is equal to all other life forms, not above or below, but equal to. As Skywoman so aptly framed this relationship, "The challenge to keep the lands and people intact for the expressed purpose of sustaining life is our goal. Honor and respect our land because you were given to the land, to provide us life, and for us to give life to the land." Therefore, the land is recognized as a living being, and considered to be the giver of life. The Cree words, "*Kikawinaw Askiy*" are translated to mean our Mother Earth, and are inclusive of all life. Then, the concept of shared kinship is the implication. The sacredness of this land connection was discussed earlier in this chapter. Skywoman stated, "We are from the healing land (*iyiniwaskamkaw*), that is our relationship to the land and our

connection here.” The holistic thinking that is required to understand this perspective is suggested in the following statement by Bernie: “As First Nations people, the first thing we believe in is the Great Spirit. The Great Spirit maintained everything. There was a connection between us, the animals, the land, the water, the sun; everything was in a circle.”

This sentiment was echoed in the words of Charles, “In destroying Mother Earth, you destroy all humanity.” This statement reflects the interdependency between human beings and the land. Vincent suggested, “We really do not profit from the earth itself because we live in harmony with it.”

The relationship with the land is represented by gift giving, or offerings made to the spiritual forces of Nature. The earth gave all types of gifts to the people in bountiful, unconditional ways. Skywoman affirms this in the statement, “You have all the gifts that will help you each day to provide for life. These gifts are food, medicine, clothing, shelter, water, air, and fire. All of these are life giving.” In thanking the earth for these life-giving gifts, Florence said, “We give back to the earth what we take, we make offerings.” “For every thing you take from the land you must give tobacco,” stated Skywoman. Mike makes the physical connection of man to Earth as follows: “The earth is a living entity. The trees are the lungs of Mother Earth, their job is to provide us with oxygen.”

Skywoman goes on to share a partial explanation between the relationship of the Cree language and the spiritual connection to the land, plants, and animals. She explained:

The Cree language describes your tongue (*mihtayani*) (*kweyaskosi* means to whistle) and how your tongue is related to the animal (bear is *maskwa*) and the ground or land is *askiy*. The grass is *maskwasiy*. If you put the bear, *maskwa* and the land *askiy*, it gives you the grass, *maskwasiy*. But that is another thing.

When you study spirituality, that is where you learn.

Mike, on the other hand shares our interconnectedness in another way. He noted, “Our relatives the animals and plants, are the spiritual beings. They are here because every day they remind us. They are our teachers.” Skywoman emphasizes the importance of our obligation to the land. “Furthermore, we assume the responsibility and authority entrusted to mothers, grandmothers, and daughters as provided in our Natural Laws, for we are the keepers of the land.”

Oral Tradition, Legends, and Language

(Iyin'to Isihtwawina, Ahtayokewina, Nehiyawewin)

Oral tradition — *Iyin'to Isihtwawina*

The oral tradition has played a central role in linking the past and present. The translation of the root word *iyin'to* “being common.” *Isihtwa* means “performing a right”; thus, way of worship, way of doing things. Many legends are still told in the oral tradition using Cree as the medium for storytelling. These are reflected in the following teachings shared by Skywoman and Bernie.

Skywoman expressed:

The grandmothers would talk about the changes, prophecies that we would see in our lives. The stories were told, the young had a chance to listen and then

ask questions. They were like mysteries, these stories. You need to hear it constantly to be able to tell the story yourself. The training was in the language that was not used everyday. It is beyond that, it is the healing language. The language is a feeling that is described in words. . . . The terms used at that time were not understood, 45 years later it is interpreted as the values in the legends, prophecies.

Bernie recalled his childhood experience and his relationship with his grandparents relating to oral traditional teachings:

When I looked back, we were very fortunate that we had our grandfathers and grandmothers that lived the life. But, as young children we did not truly understand at that time what their values and beliefs were. As we got older we started understanding a bit more. I remember our grandmother and our grandfather kept us and would tell us the legends and the metaphors. When we look at the metaphors today, which were from their teachings, the values and beliefs integrated into them. It was their role and responsibility that we understood them. I did not understand them at the time, but today I truly understand what they were telling us.

Skywoman said:

Storytelling is part of our educational system. Old people tell you a story.

When the old people told you a story, I always thought they were playing mind games. When you asked a question, they did not give you an answer, they told

a story. These stories are just like those fables, you have to figure out what is the bottom line. If you can arrive at the bottom line, you have the answer.

She described the rigor of learning through the story telling method:

We developed ourselves by listening and looking. These are the tools of our learning. These are the teaching methods that we used over and over. We stored the story in our heads, and we repeated these to ourselves until we had it right. When you have it right, you put it in our heart, and you will never lose it. Nobody will ever be able to take it away from you. . . . It takes a long time to sit and listen and not move around. Once you start fidgeting, the story teller will notice and tell you that you are not ready. The great teachers expected the learners to listen for up to seven hours. If you are too sleepy, hungry, or restless, then you cannot learn. It is because the legends are so interesting, you are listening to the oral representation of the teaching that you want to know more. The grandmothers taught in detail about the events, the legend itself; and they used questioning cues to keep your interest. They would quit once the learner would fidget. Then you would have to wait for the grandmother to be prepared to sit and start all over again from the beginning. Seldom would a person today read a book from cover to cover; it was like that with the old ladies. Once the work was done and everybody was sitting, you gave tobacco to the teacher. Before she takes your tobacco she will remind you, "now remember, you have to sit still and listen, you cannot learn the story if you do not listen." Sometimes it would take four nights to tell the whole story. From the

time the sun went down to when the sun came up she would talk. At the end of the story telling there was time to ask questions. The questions would be kept for you to ask at the end. Or she would ask you, the listener, to tell her what the relationship was between the ducks and *Wesakecak*. She would ask what the moral of the story was, or what the theme was and what it taught you. These were based on the Laws. We could begin to understand why we are like this because we inherited the ways of our first brother, *Wesakecak*. So that is why Indian people share some traits in common, for example, the joker, kin, embellisher, and so on. To begin to understand what an Indian is, it is all about the traits that are identifiable in the legends.

Legends — *Atayokewina*

Legends played a significant role in the teachings. The origin of the Cree root word for “legends” is also important. *Ahtayokan* is a Spirit Being. *Ahtayokewin* means these are stories that have a Spirit. Skywoman shared the following regarding legends:

There are some legends. When the Creator first let us come here, there was good and bad at that time, too. The Cree people are the keepers and healers — *iyiniwak*. We are the healing people. *Nehiyaw*, means four spirit person. If we understood what the terms meant, we can remember what we have to do.

Everyday we have to work on each of the four directions. We have to pray for the strength. It is there. It still applies, and we have to live with it. You have to be very young to choose that lifestyle to believe and live that belief. . . . The training was in the language that was not used everyday. It is beyond that. It is

the healing language. The language is a feeling that is described with the words. To interpret the exact meaning is difficult.

I observe people, and I see that we have gone from one extreme to another. From our grandparent's way of life to getting an education. They wanted us to have both; the education and to live with the old ways. One must understand who they are, because along the way they can get lost. Values traditionally were taught in the home, but now they are not.

You can learn every day for the next 100 years and still not get to the bottom. There is lots of learning to be done, and now there is the White man's way. There is so much to learn to take us one more step into life's truth. . . . What you hear, what you see, and what you feel is what will take you into believing about truth, about your own culture. Nobody can take it from you then. It is up to you to find your gift.

Language — *Nehiyawewin*

Both Bernie and Skywoman speak of the connection of language to the land and the universe in general. They emphasize language and feeling. The word *nehiyawewin* is derived from the word *nehiyaw*, a Cree person. *Wewin* makes the word into a noun meaning Cree language.

"Language is very important because it is more relevant to the land, to Mother Earth, to everything that surrounds us," stated Bernie. The language encodes the identity of the Cree people. Skywoman explained the translation:

The language tells the story because *nehiyawewin* (Cree language), think of the word itself, what is it derived from? What is the root word? It describes that you are talking four directions, and the language if you study it, it is a feeling, an expression. You can almost feel the movement, the feeling about what is going on when you tell the story; and that is why your language is your feeling.

Cree verbs and nouns are based on spirit. Some words are inanimate. These are the words that describe man-made items. The natural aspects of life made by the Creator are spiritually derived and are animate. Nouns are verb-based. Any word can be created, depending on its purposefulness. The language of feeling is expressed in evolving relationships to one another. All animate beings are in relationship and therefore, the Cree language does not contain pronouns. These relationships provide life and the words are made as the story is told.

Skywoman described the nature of the interaction between speaker and listener in the following way: "It is in your own thought/mind that you will use, that is how you develop. And that was our way. There was not any written text, you sat there until you understood. You will understand in the mind, but you have to put it here in the heart; and only then you will heal." She was explaining the importance of listening intently to what the speaker was imparting. The relationship between the speaker and listener was intense. If the listener could feel the intent of the speaker, the interaction was purposeful. However, if the listener only partially understood in the intellectual sense, then the relationship was not validated. Then the speaker's intent was not fully

brought to heart, and the information could be misused. The speaker would be hurt as a result.

Addressing the spiritual intention of the use of language in prayer, Florence supplied her experience:

This language, I pray in Cree, it is spiritual to hear your language. We went to a sweat lodge for physical reasons, and then it became a place to pray to the Creator and to be able to pray in the language that has meaning. It felt like now I am having a dialogue with the Creator, just like, is this what life is supposed to be all about?

The Cree language has multiple applications in the world of the Cree speaker. So far the participants described the language as it is used in prayer, healing, and in defining relationship to the land. Another function of language is in determining the interdependence among all living beings by calling to mind our relationship to each one. Bernie supplied an example of how we relate to each other as families and extended families:

Defined in our language was the relationship, roles, and responsibilities of the extended family. One example is the word “auntie” in Cree is *nikawiys* literally translated means “my little mother.” The role of the auntie was to take the place of the mother, she would take over the mother’s responsibility of training the child like her own in the absence of the child’s mother.

Hence, everyone addressed each other by their kinship relationship term, giving that primary importance versus their name. Bernie’s description suggested that the people

rarely used each other's proper name in everyday situations. Using the kinship, therefore, demonstrated the respect between the people.

Skywoman further stressed the connection between the language and relationships:

Once you understand the Cree language, you can make a model, and the whole things fits. All are interrelated. They all fit, and once you understand, you will learn to respect. The Cree language describes your tongue and how your tongue is related to the animal and the ground, but that is another thing. When you study spirituality, that is where you learn.

Governance

(Iyiniw Pahminsowin)

The second area of significance in which the participants shared their knowledge and expertise was that of governance. At times the participants used Cree words to describe the importance of their philosophy and connectedness to the Creator. The English language could not reflect the true meaning of the word as the philosophy is embedded in the language itself. *Iyiniw pahminsowin* is the Cree term that describes how order and organization were given to the people. *Iyiniw* refers to the healing people. Skywoman places *pahminsowin* into a context that is best left in her voice:

In defining self-government we cannot use the word '*tipeymisowin*' because we can never *tipeymisonaw wikac* (be totally independent of everything). *Tipeyta* is the root word, which means "to own," *sonaw* means "ourselves," and *wikac* means "never." Literally translated it means "we can never own ourselves."

Because, who was born here by himself/herself? Nobody. We all are born to families, to parents. Those parents were loaned *kiyanaw* [us], the Creator loaned the two people the child. We were all loaned children, we do not own them. *Pahminsowin*, now that is different, this is where I can regulate my activity. The root word *pahmiyta* translates to “be in control or to take care of.” I work for myself.

Thus, Skywoman asserted that we are not individualistic and independent of each other, much less the Creator. We have been born into a social order that is based on sacred laws and teachings of responsibility to one another. Hence, we are interconnected and interdependent beings. At no time in our lives, are we ever alone. We each have to fulfill roles and responsibilities as a result of our birth into Cree society.

Roles and Responsibilities — *Kanawapaminkowina*

In this section, the importance of roles and responsibilities defined in the relationship and kinship will provide deeper meaning within a context of spirituality.

To open this discourse, Bernie sets the context of spirituality as the place where everything begins. The people were a part of an interdependent system of Creation:

As First Nations people, the first thing we believe in is the Great Spirit, the Great Spirit maintained everything, there was a connection between us, the animals, the land, the water, the sun; everything was in a circle. I believe that what we did onto people and the Creator’s creation we did onto ourselves. So basically, First Nations are responsible to the Great Spirit and the Great Spirit

maintained that the Natural Laws that we have was something that we wanted to live with.

Mike further stated, "Our relatives, the animals and plants, are the spiritual beings. They are our teachers." In stating this, he is demonstrating the interrelationships between people and the rest of Creation. The extent of relationships between the land and the people are blazed within the psyche as Skywoman concurred:

Sin to us Indian people is different, it is responsibility or lack of responsibility. The first responsibility is to the children, Elders, disabled and the animals. If you do not feed an animal when they cannot feed themselves, as in domestic animals or even the wild ones; if you do not look after your responsibility, that is your sin. There are four illnesses; mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual. Sin is explained as in torturing animals or playing with nature, that is sin.

Every generation after that will pay for the sin for seven generations.

The word *pastahowin* means "sin." *Pastaha* is the root word and refers to crossing over the boundaries. Then, when one crosses these boundaries, imbalance is the result. Bernie, Mike, and Skywoman explained the importance of responsibilities for people in relation to the whole world and to the future generations.

The first important principle is that everybody was considered as part of the circle. No single being was better, greater, more eminent, or such to any other. Mike related his own learning of this lesson of responsibility to the whole in the following narrative:

I was taught humility, humbleness, and that you do not challenge your fellow man, so try and listen and understand and give your time for another person to speak, or provide an opportunity for them to do so. There is no one person who is higher or greater, even if they are wealthy on this earth. We are all equal. Our Creator provided us with that. It makes sense because then you are not hoarding the power nor the control. You feel better, it makes you stronger. It enhances a person to be strong because they see that relationship has been built with people and also the ability to depend on each other. The trust that is necessary is there; you trust people.

The governance structure depicted in Figure 4 outlines the entire governance structure of traditional Cree society. At the hub of the structure is the traditional knowledge, the core of Cree life. The spokes of the wheel include leadership, women's society, hunters, Elders, medicine persons, peacekeepers, gatherers, and criers. Although the participants do not speak to each part of the governance body,

Figure 4. Traditional open organizational structure.

they do share their experiences in some areas as follows. It is important to note, however, that traditional Cree governance structures included membership in all eight sections as noted in Figure 4. Everyone had a place in the society, as several of the participants shared.

Bernie remarked on this traditional knowledge and its source:

We always had responsibilities and everyone had a role in our governance, in our camp. Otherwise we would not have survived. There was a system in place in terms of responsibility and that goes back to the higher level of power, the Great Spirit who was linked to the older people. They became our teachers and leaders in our communities. It was accepted, and it worked for us in our communities because we had total respect for the Spirit, total respect for our Elders, total respect for Mother Earth, total respect for the sun, total respect for birds and animals. We depended on animals for our survival. Our Elders believed that those values of caring, sharing, honesty, and determination; all had spirit. That Spirit comes alive in terms of what we do with our lives. Our forefathers had roles and responsibilities, therefore they had an effective government.

The responsibility of the Elders is being the keepers of the traditional knowledge. They earned this through their experiences of living each of the stages of development.

Bernie stated:

I remember the Elders praying like thanking the Great Spirit for this day, because they would not know if they were going to be here tomorrow. So in

this way, they could do the best they could for that particular day for their families and for the survival of their communities.

Elders are closely connected to the Creator. Their role is to pass on this knowledge to their descendents. Vincent added that the passing on of this information is how the Cree people retained continuity: "That is the roles and responsibilities of leadership, matters of spirituality and language and retention of values." Vincent's comments of how values are retained intact by the Elders continuing to respond to their roles is echoed through Bernie's voice:

The way I understand our values as given to us by our Elders and by our spiritual leaders is that we were a collaborative society, we all worked together. We all had roles and responsibilities because of our relationship to the land, relationship to the universe, and the relationship to the animals and birds; there was meaning to it. The roles and responsibilities of the Elders is for them to determine what type of leaders we need in our communities.

In a previous section, the grandparents were described as the storytellers and teachers of the young. Bernie provided his own memories of learning in this fashion. In so doing, he also expanded upon the above statement by his analogy.

The children learned under the Elders, so they became quick learners, and there were always things that happened. The way that my grandfather told me was that, at a certain age, children were informed of their responsibilities. They would relate the events to a saskatoon branch. My grandfather said, "This is a woman saskatoon branch and where the root grew is the baby. As they would

get older they would become flowers and the flowers is the time of change for woman and they bear fruit which means that the woman can now bear a child.” They always had ceremonies for that. They knew exactly when this process would happen and the old ladies would take the younger women and tell them about the facts of being a woman and the responsibilities of being a woman. On the other hand, the younger men had to seek a vision by the time they were 13 or 14 years of age. That vision was more or less to look at themselves as human beings and what their responsibility was. So at a very early age, the young women and young men knew exactly what their roles and responsibilities would be in the future. The education system was there, and they also had the leadership and Elders to train and guide them through the process.

Skywoman begins the discourse on the importance of women in Cree society through the example of the place of the grandmother’s role, and as confirmed by Vincent’s statement, “If you look at the old, old stories it was based on women.” Skywoman said, “*Nohtokwewak* (grandmothers); we were a matrilineal society. We are left with the responsibility to ensure that women get back to the forefront, the matriarchy. Women, *iskwewak*, should be respected and honored because we are life, we tend to all jobs and we are the keepers of the fire.” The term *nohtokwew* is from the root, *nohtokwet*. Skywoman explained this term to mean when an old woman has no room left in her home because every space is occupied, through her kindness her home fire is full of children. The Cree term for a woman is *iskwew*. The root word comes from the word *iskwetew*, fire. Therefore, the word, *iskwew*, meaning woman links the women

with their responsibility to keep the home fire in their homes. Skywoman's teachings affirm the importance of women in traditional society.

Teaching of the Teepee — *Omekewap Kiskinohamakewina*

Skywoman provided an excellent narrative on the teepee teaching (Figure 6) and the role of women and men. This knowledge, passed on through the interview in an oral tradition, will be kept intact as an example of how the traditional knowledge is passed along as teaching stories. In this most relevant story, the roles of women, men, children, and grandparents are identified. First of all, the teepee is the basis of our home; it is also the basis of our society. It shapes our world view in relations and in relationship to how we have to pattern and work together as a community. The teepee

Figure 5. Woman's teepee teaching.

teaching is the basis for the role of woman and her teaching. It is the woman's lodge. The woman is the owner and sole person responsible for her own lodge; she has to make the lodge. If she does not know how, she has to learn how and women work together to build the teepee.

The teepee represents the structure of our communities and the role of women in Cree Society accompanied with the values. If [you] visualize the teepee and the way the teepee stands, it is wide at the base, forming a circle, much like the base of a cone. The base of the teepee represents the woman's skirt bottom, as it touches Mother Earth. The top of the teepee represents her dress top. The wind flaps at the top of the teepee represents the woman's hands reaching out and standing in this form (her hands outstretched). The structure of the teepee represents the woman standing there and giving thanks to the Creator. Our teaching is that the women were given the gift of life-giving, through childbirth, and that was the Creator's design of humankind and all of life. The woman has the gift of child-bearing and that responsibility. The Creator, in sharing spiritual power to give life, bestowed this sacred gift upon women in this world. So there is so much to the woman's teachings. The teepee teaching is the woman's gift, and the teepee is the woman's place, her lodge. She is the owner, the keeper, the caretaker.

She uses everything around the lodge to nourish and maintain her lodge in a clean, good way. She uses the energy from the sun and transforms that into fire within her lodge. The fire represents spirit, and that spirit is within each

one of us. When a child is born, the child has spirit. The woman has to nurture that spirit, and it is symbolic, a fire in the center of her lodge is what she is nurturing. By nurturing her fire, she is also nurturing her children, her spouse, and her extended family that live within her lodge. She uses that fire as a cooking fire, to nurture her family. She uses the fire to give warmth. She uses the fire to bring light to her lodge, and all of these things are done in a good way. She has to cook in a good way with good thoughts. Her intentions must be good because if she does not cook with good thoughts and intentions, she passes that energy on to her children. Therefore, it is very important for a woman to be conscious about what she is thinking. A woman has to be all of these things. In bringing warmth (the fire is warmth), which is not only physical warmth but also emotional warmth, a woman has to have love for herself and all the people who are within the family. Emotional warmth has to be present so when people come to visit they will be basked within this warmth. They will come there with good intentions in a good way and leave with that warmth in their spirit. That is her job. It is a job that is nourished with light and loving intention.

She does everything with light, but it is not just the physical everyday. It is what we see and what we do not see, the known and the unknown in our environment, in our world. In the teepee, the known is what we see, which refers to everything we do on a daily basis. The unknown is based on the spiritual aspect of what happens in that lodge.

Responsibilities of the women are greater than the men. Another of the responsibilities that the woman has is to be a bundle-keeper, because the bundle has to be kept in the teepee lodge. It has to be kept in a good way with that light. As a bundle-keeper, the woman's responsibility is to make sure that the bundle is always taken care of. She is not only taking care of the physical being but also taking care of the spiritual aspect of her family. It is the man's bundle, but the woman is the keeper of the bundle. It is the man's role to leave the lodge because he has to hunt, to provide protection and so on. He cannot be there looking after that bundle every single day, every minute.

A woman also cannot speak to the bundle on behalf of her family. She has to ask her husband to do that. It is her role as a woman to keep that whole circle, and she knows what is needed there. She has to work together with her partner. He has to speak on her behalf. Therefore, she has to be in good communications with her spouse so he can speak on her behalf to ask for the things she needs in the circle.

If the woman speaks to the bundle, she will get more information and knowledge. If she gets more information she will still want more. That is another weakness of women, we are very curious. We ask a lot of questions. When we ask too many questions, things happen to us. A woman who wants to know too much can lose her mind. She can go crazy. If she does, everything in her circle of responsibility will perish. That is why that rule is there. That is one of the checks and balances and the way of keeping men and women working

together and keeping a state of being in balance. That is why in the ceremonies the women sit on the outer circle.

The grandmothers sat there in the outer circle of the ceremony and watched for years and years because it is their role to straighten men out. Especially in the instance if the men are doing something wrong within the ceremony, they are not allowed to take shortcuts. It is the women's responsibility to say to the men, "You have to do this or do it this way, *kweyask* (the right way)." On the other hand, it is not her role to be within that inner circle in offering the pipe. It is the same thing in the woman's pipe offering; she has to speak to the man to go present the pipe on her behalf to ask for the help she needs. So there are all these balances within our society. So basically, the woman's teachings is only one. Therefore, it is the woman's role to be the keeper. This was one way men and women worked collaboratively in traditional society.

Every pole in the teepee has a teaching, and those are the teachings of the woman; they are responsible for their transference. A long time ago when teepees were brought together in camp, everybody worked together to set up the camp. A person coming from a distance could see the community. They would see the stronghold of the camp, the strength of the community, and the abilities of the community. Due to the communal significance of women, as symbolized in the teepee teaching, if the women do not have the responsibility and respect in the community, then that community is not going to be solid or strong. Thus,

we have to acknowledge the communal power of the women, their duties, and responsibilities so our communities continue to be the good place they were intended to be. In order to do that, the women need to be nurtured and understood in terms of what they do for a community. In conclusion, the teepee teaching emphasizes the significance of the roles and responsibilities of women.

Clans, Interdependence — *Aahamew, Aayasow Wicihtowin*

The participants voiced a common understanding of the importance of living an interdependent existence in the community. The society had roles and responsibilities for each person in the camp. The organization of the camp was based on family and the families association with the clan system. Although, not named herein, the clan system was referenced often, as it is part of the participants' memories. On his memory of the clan system, Mike recalled:

I look back in our history, and I do not want to glorify it, but it was based on clans. Every clan had a leader as a head chief. The clan chose someone that was outstanding. Within those clans, there was harmony, understanding, acceptance, and healthy communities. Each clan relied on their own, their education, their way of life. Each clan had their own medicine people and hunters; these were the teachers of their own clan. They were strong because they had everything. They worked together and were not departmentalized. The clan might have broken down leadership into categories, but they were all together. All positions were earned; that is why everybody accepted them. There were leaders in hunting because they were good trackers. Those were the

people who had good value judgement. For any major thing, they would all get together and make major decisions. They would decide when to move when a certain part of the country was hunted out, fished out, even where their homes were going to be, where they would be going for their winter camps. They had to make decisions on all sort of things.

Skywoman noted:

It was the headman and keepers that where the nucleus of the circle; they were chosen by the people to keep the four directions. A long time ago when they chose a leader, it was almost like that person was spiritual. He had two or three of those four directions. He was a good hunter, he shared, and he knew about his people — about their emotional and physical hurts. He recognized that. He helped his people, he never got tired of his position or anything. The head chief would go out to feed all his people when something was brought, and whatever little was left, he kept for himself.

Charles also relied on his memory of how the clan system worked together:

In the old days our communities followed a clan system. Family units had a head spokesperson as their leader. They would form part of a large council. They worked collectively and worked for the common good. The community itself was not responsible to the headman, nor was the headman responsible to any one individual; but they were responsible as a group to each other in that they shared responsibilities to maintain their lifestyles for the survival of the whole community.

The shared success of community life was due to the existence of the clan system in keeping communication, dialogue, and decision-making open to everyone in the camp. Decisions that affected the whole camp would be discussed in the lodges of the families. Discussion among the members of the clan would occur until consensus was reached. Mike described this practice:

In the winter, as leaders of their clans, they would have meetings. But at the same time, they would go to their own clans to explain and report on the leader clan meetings. The clans would discuss matters until they came to a resolution called a consensus. Sometimes they did not agree, then they would discuss it some more; a lot of times things were changed. It was for the benefit of all the people that the meetings were held by consensus. There were spiritual clans, everybody belonged to a clan.

The clan system acknowledged by birthright each member's role in the society. It was a means of belonging to a group. It identified members and served to ensure that intermarriages would not occur in the society. A rule was that one could not marry a member of the same clan; it was considered to be like marrying your sibling.

Skywoman supplied the information that contains how clan membership was ascribed: "How are we to know what clans we belong to? First, we are all born with a spirit, and it does not necessarily have to be the same as either of our parents. Your spirit is more or less predetermined before you enter into this world." Accordingly, each newborn infant already had been ascribed to a clan before birth. In the spirit world, where the clan system was derived, they identify a newborn child as inheriting a

characteristic that belongs among the spirit clans. This characteristic will assist and enable the child in the physical world to meet his/her gift and live a purposeful life. Thus, Skywoman affirmed, "In the past, the Elderly women of a tribe would gather once a child was born into the community. They would celebrate the new birth by hosting a feast and pipe ceremony for the naming of this child." This ritual was done to recognize the giftedness of the newborn as being from the spirit world and ascribed to a spiritual clan. She continued:

How did the Elders know then what spirit name this child would have? This was determined by the predisposition and character of the child. The Elders had this gift through many years of experience, through practicing their culture, their connectedness with the laws of the land.

Without clearly saying how, Skywoman stated that the Elders had the ability to see the child's character. Depending on the child, the Elder may get this information through a dream, observation, or intuition. It is a skill that is gained through many years.

Summary

This section addressed the Cree World View, which included the relationship to the Creator and to Mother Earth from which the values, beliefs, and Natural Laws were drawn. The participants spoke their Cree language and followed the oral traditional mode of storytelling in providing the traditional knowledge in this section of the study. Key Cree words were used as an expression of importance of the language throughout this section, thus giving an example of how the Cree values and beliefs are embedded in the language. The participants also reflected on the significance of their ceremonies in

maintaining the traditional knowledge. Finally, they reflected on their traditional knowledge which guided their governance systems prior to European contact. This is an overview of their beliefs and values which provided for the scope of this study. It is not to be considered as a complete and whole version of the Cree world view.

The next section of this chapter will address the impact of the European colonial process, and how this has left their communities oppressed and devastated.

Impact of the Colonial Relationship

This section is divided into three topics: the First Nations and European relationships, the legislative implications, and the socio-cultural implications.

Legislative implications addresses: (a) Treaties, (b) Indian Act, (c) Governance structures, and (d) resulting changes in governance systems of First Nations people.

The socio-cultural implications topic is subdivided as follows: (a) conflicting value systems, (b) welfare, (c) church and residential schools, (d) loss of spirit, and (e) shame and blame.

First Nations and European Relationships

In order to understand the current state of First Nations leadership, we must look to the past. To find some answers, the participants discussed First Nations and European relationships. The initial dealings of First Nations people and Europeans were reflected by mutual understanding and sharing. This was the point in history that Europeans needed the expertise of First Nations in order to survive in the harsh climate of the new world. Charles stated, "I do not think that the Europeans would have

survived in this continent had it not been for the caring and sharing of our people at that time.”

Unfortunately, once the Europeans mastered the skills of survival, they no longer needed the assistance of First Nations’ people. At this point in history, the relationship shifted from an equal partnership to a dominant-subordinate state. The results of this interaction of First Nations people and Europeans is as Vincent explained, “Everything has been affected by European systems. I think you would have to be in a time capsule since contact not to have been affected.”

Prior to European arrival, First Nations had their own effective governance systems. Vincent debated the effects of original contact on both the First Nations and the Europeans. He shared the following:

We have affected European people, too. Without us, they would not be strong today. We have to point that out to them. We have given them a lot. We have given them a system of government, however much they [Europeans] have ruined it. That democracy is going to rule the world one day, and this is the Indian form of government. It is government by representation instead of government by consensus, the way it should be. We have to show them how to lead by consensus. Those European systems would have crumbled if they had never found us here. They ruined us, but we saved them more than they saved us. They may rule us, but we saved them. United States of America is the watchdog of the world right now, and that is because we made them. Native people made them strong.

Legislative Implications

Legislative impacts addresses the Treaties, the Indian Act, Governance structures-hierarchies, paternalistic bureaucracies, and the resulting changes in First Nations governance.

Treaties. The first time First Nations leaders experienced formal negotiations founded on a foreign legal, written, and documented system was at the signing of the Treaties. Prior to this, Charles noted:

At one point in our history people had self-determination. We established our own laws, a way to live and work together. These laws were not written, but the fact remains we had some regulations as to how we would live from day-to-day for our existence and ongoing survival.

First Nations leaders played a very important role in the negotiations of the Treaties, as these Treaties were seen to have an impact on seven generations of children yet to be born. The understanding of the First Nations people was that the Treaties were sacred and would never be broken by either Nation. Referring to the spirit and intent of the Treaties, Skywoman understood:

The spirit and intent of the Treaty affirms our life's work as *Nehiyawak*. It is because of this, the grassroots people continue to struggle and challenge the leaders of today to bring to fruition the intended purpose of the sanctity of the Treaty agreements as determined by our forefathers. The grassroots people stand by this inherent right to live and abide by the Creator's laws in order to forge a life of sacredness in modern society.

The Treaty set in motion the bundle of rights which would be held in trust forever by the two Nations of people who participated in the deal. The *Nehiyaw* bundle of rights includes the water, air, animals and plants [land], and the fire. The Crown's people claimed to inherit the taxation, peace, and government bundle of rights. Our forefathers requested education and health rights because they knew that the succeeding generations of people must understand the lifestyles of the people of the Crown. These terms of the Treaty were basic necessities for life to continue for both parties. The terms set down the path of the *Nehiyawak* and the people of the Crown to live side by side and share the land. It was believed that the paths were distinct in that the forefathers firmly believed in continuing to live by the laws of the Creator. As the four directions people, our life's work is to redefine our customs and traditions in a world of complexity. The challenge is our inherent right to pursue and succeed no matter what the odds. The spirit and intent of the Treaties is foremost in our struggle to succeed and meet this challenge as our basic and inherent right to self-determination.

The participants spoke of the leadership traits, characteristics, and roles of those who were chosen by their people to sign Treaties. They also discussed how the First Nations communities organized themselves at the time of the Treaties. Bernie remembered from the stories told to him by his Elders that leaders were chosen because they practiced their values and ensured that their people's interests came first. He expressed these teachings in the following:

Leaders were chosen for their strong spiritual beliefs; they were also very kind, caring, and sharing. The people would come first, and they would come last. They would take care of their people in all ways. They were well-disciplined within themselves. They were visionary leaders. They knew what to do. They knew what was coming. They believed in the Higher Power, who guided them every day, plus they believed that the spirits would also guide them. The signatories of the treaties were very strong because we feel it today, we have rights to education, health, land, and our language.

Vincent also explained the importance of the Creator's guidance, and the results are felt by the First Nations of Treaty Six to this day. He said, "I believe the First Nations leaders had Divine guidance because what other Treaty but Treaty Six wanted a medicine chest clause to be included in their treaty."

Florence added how everybody's voice was heard. She said, "Because they were in a circle, everybody's voice was important, everyone who had something to say about the situation was heard." The trait of humbleness was important to the Cree people. Skywoman explained: "No matter how great a Chief was, he was humble enough to go back to all his people and ask them what they thought."

Although laws were not written, the Cree First Nations followed an unwritten code for their survival. Mike explained the importance of the spiritual laws in Cree society. He stated:

Before the coming of the white man there had to be some rules. There had to be some order for them to survive all those thousands of years. We were given the

spiritual way of life, for earth living was physical. The mind was the mental, and how we felt, the emotional side; they all knew and understood that.

Prior to the signing of the Treaties, the First Nations communities had already experienced many of the effects of the newcomers on their lands. Florence described what the communities were faced with in the following statement:

The role of the First Nations treaty signers was to be far-sighted, to think ahead; because at the time they were signing treaties, they were in transition. They could see from behind how their life was, and they could not stay in the same position. They thought about the future because, in that short time, there was already devastation for our way of life. Their role was to keep as much of their way, to keep their survival and ensure that their children had a future.

Bernie explained the significance of the pipe ceremonies when First Nations signed the Treaties with the European people. In using the pipe as their guide in the Treaty signing, the Cree people made promises they have kept to this day. He said:

They had a significant role because they envisioned what this land would look like after they met with the white settlers. Our people were peace-oriented, caring, always believing in equality. The intent of the Treaty signers was that they would live in peace and harmony with their white brothers and sisters. We kept this to date, we never went to war. They believed the Great Spirit was witness to the signing. Once they pulled out the peace pipe (a significance of honesty), which they maintained with the Great Spirit, they would live in

harmony with the people of this country. Only later, after the signing of the Treaties, did they recognize they had become subservient to the process.

The understanding of the Treaty-making process as described by Skywoman was long and carefully thought out. The First Nations people depended on their ceremonies to guide them through this important event. Skywoman added to Bernie's understanding of this process:

The Treaty signers had their own understanding, their own value systems which they carried to the round table for discussion. Before they agreed, it took them awhile because they kept going back to their ceremonies, to ask for guidance from the Creator ensuring what they were doing was lasting. It would last forever; as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow. That in itself is very sacred. They had included their pipe and the strength of that pipe did their talking for them. It gave them the direction.

Vincent stated, "The Treaty signatories were looking at the generations to come, seven generations into the future." The philosophy of the Cree people was that all decisions made in the present should be made with the principal that it should benefit seven generations ahead.

Bernie tells another story of how some First Nations refused to sign the Treaties:

When the last of the Treaties was being signed in the Sunchild/O'Chiese area, in the 1950s, a Commissioner came up to John O'Chiese and asked him. Why do you not sign? He [John O'Chiese] said, "You see that bird up there in the tree?

That bird has just as much right as you to live on this Mother Earth. Mother Earth does not belong to us, we belong to Mother Earth. That is where we come from, and that is where we will go back to.” Basically, he came from a humble aspect of life that we do not own this earth; this earth owns us. They wanted to be traditional. They did not want to lose any of their rights to their religion, their way of life, and they maintained that.

The Elders of the First Nations communities continue to discuss the significance of the Treaty signing and, through the oral traditional teachings, their understanding of what was committed at this important event. Bernie and Mike shared their understanding of this event. Bernie said:

They (Treaty Six Chiefs) agreed because they knew the white man was going to be here and also agreed that only certain parts of the land would be taken. To this day, the Elders say they never gave up the mountains because they were the symbol of strength of a Nation. We also have come to understand they (Treaty signatories) gave up only 6 inches of top land so people (Europeans) could survive, but they went beyond that in terms of taking the rich resources we have in this country.

Mike agreed with Bernie’s understanding, and he added that additional land was to have been used for economic development. He stated, “A thirty mile strip at the foot of the mountains would be considered for their [First Nations] economic development.” He identified some of the Treaty promises made by government officials, “We will give you a different way of life. Your way of life which involved hunting and living off the

land cannot support you. We will give you tools from which you can make a living, an oxen, a walking plow. Our promises will last forever; so long as the sun shines, the rivers flow, and the grass grows.” They [First Nations] were told by the government people, “nobody can break those promises.”

Cherrilene described her experience on how difficult it is to speak on behalf of the Treaties:

In several meetings, the Federal government says they do not believe in the Treaties; they take it as mere policy. It does not mean we [First Nations leaders] buy into it. First Nations leaders are in a real predicament nowadays. The Treaties signed 100 plus years ago are sacred because the signing began and ended with a pipe ceremony. This is the sacredness of the Treaties. I actually weep when I talk about the Treaties. We believe in a Nation-to-Nation relationship between Ottawa and First Nations.

Indian Act. Canadian government legislature passed the Indian Act in 1876. This Act impacts all aspects of First Nations members from their birth to their death. This legislative tool has outlawed First Nations spiritual beliefs, removed children from their families and communities, restricted First Nations members from leaving their reserves, dictated the selling and buying of grain and livestock and, in general, denied the rights of citizenship (e.g., voting) that the average citizen has taken for granted.

All of the participants’ comments pertaining to the Indian Act share a common theme: its manipulative and undermining impact on the First Nations form of governance.

Mike stated:

We were under the clan system before the treaties, before the Indian Act. The Treaties and the Indian Act started about the same year. Treaty Six was signed in 1876, which was when they enforced the Indian Act, the way they would administer us. They dressed it [Indian Act] up at the time, it sounded pretty good. They knew what they were doing because they had the experience in Africa and in all those other colonized countries. They knew where they made their mistakes. They were ready for us. They had to have an Act. We are the only country in the world that has an Indian Act.

Vincent identified the difference between the Treaties and the Indian Act. He expressed his understanding as, "The treaty process is still binding; what watered it down was the Indian Act. The Indian Act should be abolished because it is way past, way overdue, but the Treaty should live forever." As a result of this Bernie stated, "We are not recognized as a government; we have more or less a municipal status, according to the Government of this country."

Cherrilene explained there is a definite concern that government wants to diminish their fiduciary responsibilities, the trust obligation the Federal government has with First Nations. She stated, "We are in the devolution process, assimilation; Federal Government is pushing their mandate." Cherrilene spoke to the dilemma faced by First Nations leaders:

On the one hand, there is a high unemployment rate. People want development, but there is no development. On the other hand, the government, the

Department is trying to undermine the Treaties. It is very difficult to make your decisions, and it is sad because you want to employ your people. I understand in a sense, and yet it makes me angry and frustrated. I understand where First Nations, especially smaller Bands, grab the money that is available.

The Indian Act established a procedure by which leaders would be chosen. This election system was foreign to First Nations, yet today, all First Nations communities across Canada follow these rules and regulations as dictated through the Indian Act by the Department of Indian Affairs. Vincent noted, "The Chief and Council is a power structure that was put there through the Indian Act, through Indian Affairs." He explained the differences in the First Nations governance systems prior to European contact, "We had a system of government that was holistic and maternal in nature." Bernie's view of the current situation is that "currently, we are the administrators of our own poverty by implementing policies of the federal government or other governments. So basically there is no such thing as Indian government right now in terms of what is happening in our communities."

The impact the Indian Act on contemporary leadership is reflected by Mike: Leadership today is at a loss because they do not know their identity and culture, nor do they want to know. They follow the rules that are set before them by government. Dance to my tune, as stated by government; you can have this and that is what they are doing here.

The implementation of the election laws, which are modeled after the European systems, continues to cause problems in the communities. These election laws are in

contradiction to the way leaders were chosen prior to the implementation of the Indian Act election laws. Vincent explained the present situation and the dilemma of leadership:

What our leaders have to do is to get off welfare, stop taking money from being on council because when they take money from the Band, then there are lobby groups, and they need money. It is just like a job. When that position stops being a job by election and starts being a position by what people give you, then we can make a big change. It is a real weakness and a way government has us on a string.

Clearly, the participants identified real concerns that the Indian Act has caused in governance for First Nations leaders.

Governance structures — Hierarchy and bureaucracy. First Nations systems of governance were based on a circular, egalitarian, and democratic model (Figure 4) based on clans, roles, responsibilities, and relationships of its membership. This system of governance changed with the implementation of the Indian Act. The bureaucratic, hierarchical structure presently implemented in First Nations communities is depicted in the Figure 6.

Charles explained the impact of this foreign organizational structure in First Nations communities today:

Figure 6. Contemporary hierarchical organizational chart.

First Nations are based on the European system of governance and even the bureaucracy itself. How they set up their administrative structure is a learned thing which we adopted as being our own. I remember the clash of two cultures; I thought it was the way business was done. Earlier on, the council would meet with the Indian agent. The minutes were done by the Indian agent prior to the meeting. It was a fact; the Department used to do this to the people. The Indian Agent would gather the Chief and Council, but he had already made decision. Somehow, the Council of the day was coerced to adopt that position. Members believed it was the Council who made the decision. It was a sad thing, the Indian Agent did that. Today we have learned from their system which is very bureaucratic. The Federal government still comes in with a

pre-set agenda, complete with all policies and guidelines as to how a particular program should be administered. They make this a condition for accessing funds.

The results of working in a bureaucratic, hierarchical structure are as Bernie stated:

We have adopted structures that boxed us in. We are all in isolation, still in the arms of the Federal Government and will continue to be slaves of the government through Child Welfare and Social Services. Currently, I think that we have adopted so many systems. The system has not worked for us; it will never work for us. We are trying to bring in other systems and overlap them with our traditional way of doing things in our community.

Florence succinctly explained the accumulated effect of years of the adoption and implementation of European systems, "We are leading people who still believe in the hierarchical systems."

Charles explained the contrast of philosophies and the reason for government action:

The government thought they knew what was good for us. The Europeans came to this country and saw the riches of North America. But, before they could take control, set claim to the land and the riches, they had to do something about the original inhabitants. They had to change them, civilize them, and did all these destructive things.

Vincent described the source of change which resulted in the gradual transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society:

Men have been given the authority by the European belief system for the past 500-600 years; since the fur trade. We live in power and control. There is colonialism, which is a power arrangement where the colonialists have the power and we do not. I do not like saying Chief and Council because it is a power structure that was put there through the Indian Act. Our society today is a patriarchal society based on the trading practices of the Hudson's Bay and Northwest traders. Those colonists did not have respect for women and our societies. They still do not. The consequence of the fur trade one hundred years prior to the signing of the Treaties was that our societies changed from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal society. Instead of headmen being chosen with the power of recall, which was the women's role, it became a hereditary system.

Without a doubt, all of the participants are unanimous in their views that this shift toward an elected form of tribal government has only served to alienate leaders from their communities. Cherrilene explained that "First Nations have already adopted the mainstream system, and in that system, decisions are made by a quorum." She provided an example of how decisions are made at Chief and Council level. She said:

A motion is passed; the decision is made, regardless if it's a quorum of five supporting it and four are opposed. That is where you have all the politics played. It is like you scratch my back, I will scratch yours. It becomes confusing and does not meet the needs of our people.

Mike explained the results of working under the bureaucratic structure of the Department of Indian Affairs. He compared the traditional leadership qualities to the present day leadership:

People do not pick leaders because of their leadership qualities; they try him out without thinking. In the back in their own minds they do not wonder “if we make him/her a leader, if he/she will be able to do anything, succeed at anything; or will he/she listen to us?” Today, if you become leader, we put you in an office, you shut your door on me, it is the way leadership operates. Operating in isolation, becoming departmentalized. Today, when you start comparing leadership of the day, there is nothing anywhere near representing the clans’ leaders; when we pick leaders, most of the time people do not pick leaders because of their leadership qualities.

Vincent agreed to the isolation that takes place after leaders have been elected.

Following the Indian Act, which does not require community meetings, present day leaders find themselves working separated from their own people. Vince added:

People get elected into office and, all of a sudden, there is a separation. They are behind closed doors making decisions; they are not with the people anymore. They say they are with the people, but that is not happening. The power systems that the Europeans have is a social strata. It is based on your economic viability, education, political power, and the power with the media. First Nations people do not even make it to the lowest rung of the ladder. We do not have any of that.

Bernie highlighted what has been lost since the European models of governance have been imposed. He said: “What shaped our governments was the foundation of caring, sharing, determination, and honesty. These are missing in our systems in First Nations today. Those were the things that were affected by European systems.”

From the voices of the participants, it is clear that they recognize major changes in how traditional leadership systems work and what is operating in the First Nations communities. They place blame for this squarely on the Indian Act.

Socio-Cultural Implications

This section covers conflicting values, welfare [social assistance], the impact of church and residential school experiences resulting in the loss of spirit, and the shame and blame of First Nations people. The socio-cultural factors have greatly impacted First Nations leadership and communities as the participants identify in their sharing.

Conflicting value systems. The value systems of both the First Nations and Europeans were discussed by all participants. The conflicting European values based on capitalism and individualism have influenced the economic base of First Nations people and their relationship to the land. Exploiting the natural resources has resulted in the destruction of the environment. In short, money has become the commodity of this economy.

Charles identified a difference in the value systems of the First Nations and the European society in the following comment: “The dominant society has a different value system. They will do anything to create and retain wealth, even to the point of destroying Mother Nature, water, and air, creating pollution and contamination. In

destroying Mother Earth, you destroy all humanity.” Florence expressed the results of the differences. She said:

The world today is in chaos with lots of strife, pain, and diseases. If our world was the way it was meant to be, none of these things would happen. They are happening in the greater world; not in our communities, but we feel the effects of the damage caused by the system which is not ours. A system that is economy-based. Mother Earth has been damaged in order for Europeans to have greater systems. It is an unnatural form of life because, as native people, we give. There has not been a give and take for the earth for the benefits it has given to the European systems. For the purpose of increasing their economy, they are ravaging the earth and everything is being affected.

The differences in the value systems, with the Europeans focusing on material and financial gain, have affected our environment. Mike stated his concern:

The white man is destroying our ecology. Thirty years ago there were forests where there are prairies now. If we keep cutting down our trees, we will die, because they provide oxygen. The trees are the lungs of Mother Earth; their job is to provide us with oxygen. The western approach has evolved into a materialistic one where everything you do requires money. You go to church, you are expected to make a financial contribution. Try going to see the doctor, again money. Medicine for your prescription means more money. Education is no different. You pay for every step of the way; this is just a sample of where people are in the western world.

The concept of capitalism was foreign to First Nations, but today it is one of the major blocks working against collaboration among the First Nations. Charles explained:

We, the First Nations cannot work together because one of the main barriers is the issue of money. Money is foreign to our people. It seems to be a predetermining factor as to how people are going to work with one another or not work together. The government has used this very effectively.

Charles also told a story of a Micmac lady who compared the issue of money to the diseased blankets. She said, "In the old days the Europeans used to give us diseased food, diseased blankets, and so on to get rid of us. Now all they have to do is give us this, dollar bill, and we will destroy each other."

The resources provided by the Federal Government to First Nations are in the form of money. The participants describe its divisive impact: Charles reflected on how this is done. "The federal government will cut up the financial pie where each First Nation gets so much. This is a kind of divide and conquer type of thing, and it works to their advantage." Competition among First Nations is described by Skywoman:

The biggest mistake we have made as a people here in the prairies is that we have not paid attention to our own history and our culture. We have been competing with each other. We are just a warrior society; we are not a peace society anymore because of individualism. We used to accept our suffering, we used to accept our celebrations with our extended families.

Welfare. By reinforcing a state of dependence, the welfare system has robbed Native people of their sense of pride, while also destroying their spirit. A pervasive sense of self-destruction was a common theme shared by all of the participants.

Vincent stated:

Canada is a welfare state, and we are the epitome of the welfare state in the First Nations. The government came out with their welfare in the fifties. It was the final blow to kill our spirit. Maybe our spirit did not die, but it fell asleep in that generation because those people had to give away everything to get on welfare. First, they took the kids away to residential school and then, when the kids grew up, they killed their spirit further with welfare.

Rather than providing policies and programs that would empower the First Nations to become independent and self-sufficient, the government's welfare policy reinforced a dependency mentality. Mike noted, "Using the welfare system, the government led us to believe we cannot do it without their assistance." Charles and Vincent expanded on the dependency syndrome and the effect of the breakup of kinship ties and responsibilities. Charles said, "Our people worked together very closely to meet their needs and aspirations of the day. It all changed when welfare came into being. The program now takes away any initiative, any pride that people had in earlier days. It takes away any reason for cohesive existence." Vincent added, "Kinship is another thing that has been given the blow through welfare."

In addition, both Charles and Mike explained how the loss of working collectively and collaboratively resulted in the community breaking down. Charles said:

Family units do not work together; there are all kinds of divisions and social problems because there is so much free time. It spreads out into the total community. Families used to work together, it is not the case anymore. It creates a perfect division of the community itself. We have gotten away from the issue of collectivity, doing things together. We are more concerned with individuality, instead of working for the common good. It goes beyond community, into the regional, provincial, and national levels. We lost the concept of consensus and collectivity in working together somewhere.

Mike stated:

The spirit of collaboration is just a word in our community right now. They [First Nations] use that word, but in a negative way. Welfare is one of them. When they [welfare recipients] have to get together, they are right there, waiting for their welfare cheque, that insurance cheque. We have to turn that around so we can hold our heads up in our community with the pride our ancestors had. Materially, they [our ancestors] were poor, but they were rich spiritually. Collaboration meant something to them; they knew how to help one another. They did not ask how much will you pay?

Charles explained how the welfare system has changed First Nations people, from working collaboratively for the common good, to that of a dependent state. He recalled:

Our people were doing things collectively as a team. They were caring one way or another, whether or not someone else benefitted. They were sharing the best

way they knew how. Then welfare came in; of course, all changed. That was the catalyst for change, towards more negativity. People did not do things for themselves. So rightly or wrongly, I attribute that to taking our ways apart. Once you do that to a person, you are destroying that person.

Religion and residential schools. The historical role of religion and residential schools working hand-in-hand to destroy First Nations has been well documented. It was not enough to impose the European value system; because it was necessary to destroy the First Nations cultural values, beliefs, philosophies, and customs. The attempts at government-supported cultural genocide through these two institutions are explained by Bernie:

Historically, the attitude of Christians was our ways and beliefs were paganistic. The Europeans did not understand our belief systems; they thought it was detrimental to our being, so they outlawed spiritual ceremonies. This is why for many years many people kept the ceremonies in hiding.

Reflecting on his residential school experience, Mike stated:

I was raised as a person to be something other than what I was born to be. In other words, I was raised a Catholic. I believed in Catholicism for a number of years. I started questioning in my teens. I would go to the priest, and he would say, "It is sacrilegious for you to be talking and questioning things about our belief." I said, "As long as it is human, it is not sacrilegious." I felt they had something to hide, I felt they had intent to control, and I was not one of these people that could be controlled and never ask questions. Finally, I thought

there must be another way, but I did not know any other way. *Piyisk* [finally] the Catholic church threw me out. They excommunicated me. For a number of years, I did not believe in anything. I believed I could do it alone, but in every person's life there comes a time when you need support.

Skywoman told a story about an Elder of her community at the time people were pressured to become Christian. She described how the First Nations people were encouraging an Elder, a grandfather to get baptized.

He pretended he did not hear them, so they spoke louder. "*Mosom* [grandfather], you are also to go to the church to get baptized." He finally responded. "Oh, maybe not, because I am now too old. I have always prayed; I offer my pipe every morning. I give thanks for every day that has been loaned to me. I continually hear of your involvement with Christianity and the talk about the devil, the evil one. I have never heard so much about this evil one. If I get baptized, I will start lying, stealing, and will be lazy. I will only be able to do those things so that I can go for confession. On second thought, I will not go because I do not want to be like that.

Skywoman explained that was his interpretation and understanding of the religion.

Mike's acceptance of an individual's personal beliefs and choices is highlighted by the following statement, "Catholicism and Protestantism are good in their place, but they should not be used as tools to de-Indianize."

Charles spoke to the differences between what he learned from the European institutions and the First Nations belief systems. Based on his residential school experience, he was taught:

In the European religion, we were taught God is a punishing type. But the Creator I was introduced to by my First Nations people is entirely different. I believe there is only one God. Other religions state my God is better than your God. In our religion, we believe that God is all-loving, all-forgiving, and we are never alone. The Creator is always with us. The Creator has given us everything to lead a happy, healthy, and fruitful life.

Commenting on his perception of the difference from the European Christian institutions, Charles observed:

In the European way of doing things, their religion is very much based on materialism, to gain wealth. Something happened in their history to take them away from the spiritual road. They chose to follow the material road. Our people are now dangerously close to going the material way; that remains an unspiritual road.

Vincent expressed his concern about the results of the imposition of European Christian systems on First Nations people. "There are so many people that are right into Christianity. Divide and conquer. Those guys did their homework, and they did a really good job of breaking our spiritual clans." He further expressed his personal philosophy in following the traditional First Nations spiritual path. He stated,

My mother asked me, "How come you are into this traditional stuff?" I told her, "I do not want to go where in the last two hundred years of my relations are, not just a handful of people. Maybe, it is all the same place, I do not know." They [his deceased ancestors] can make it up there, being who they are and practicing their culture everyday, instead of having to go the church, and having all those rules. Those are rules imposed by man; they are made by man.

Florence explained why she and her family decided to go back to the traditional spiritual way. "We did not grow up with the Native ceremonies. We grew up in Catholicism, but we changed systems when we started losing faith in the system. When one of the priests hit my brother, he [my brother] did not believe in the system anymore. It was really hurtful."

Skywoman's understands that, "The Europeans were also given prayer, they used their bible to live right and do things right." What puzzles her is that if they had lived by the bible she says, "they would have treated us right and cared for us."

The residential school experience affected every First Nation person directly or indirectly. Charles noted an experience shared by many of his generation:

One of the things that the government did to civilize our people was through their education institutions. They removed us from our homes and families and placed us in residential schools. It was one way of destroying our people at a particular age. I learned to be dictatorial in residential school.

Skywoman believed that residential schools and provincial schools did nothing to make meaning of her own experiences, nor validate the knowledge of her community

Elders and members. She added, "I went to school, and all I learned was how other people think. Most of the books were about other people's lives and their philosophies. I did not develop my own intelligence."

Although the residential school era ended in the 1970s in the northeast Alberta area, the effects are felt daily in First Nations communities. Mike observed, "There is so much grief and suffering as a result of residential schools." Skywoman explained the results of children being removed at a very early age from their families and communities into an institutionalized setting for 10 months of the year. Eventually, "we have lost our parenting skills."

Loss of spirit. The government's policies shifted from isolating First Nations people on reserves, to later enforcing the assimilation policy. Under that policy children were removed from their families and communities and sent to residential schools, which were located great distances from their homes. These policies have profoundly impacted First Nations people across Canada. It has left many First Nations people with a void, an emptiness. They have not assimilated, nor are they accepted into the mainstream milieu. At the same time many of their values, beliefs, and philosophies have been destroyed by these government laws and institutions. As Mike recalled:

I was not afforded the opportunity to understand Native spirituality, to learn the traditions when I was growing up. My father was one that didn't follow anything. My mother was a convent-trained woman, she was a devout Catholic. Early in my life, I did not aspire to learn my Native beliefs; but when we [my

brother and I] returned to our traditions, she [mother] was against us. She eventually came around. My father said, "The white man has divested from us, our traditions, our beliefs." The Europeans wanted us to believe something that we were not meant to believe. They did not want to assimilate us because it would mean taking us amongst them. They wanted to neutralize us, to be nothing, to be subservient to whatever they wanted us to do.

Vincent provided one example of the effects of government legislation and its gradual influence. The generations of children removed from the caring, loving, and guidance of their parents, and becoming institutionalized, resulted in First Nations people not understanding and/or attending to their responsibilities. After all, they were never taught these responsibilities in churches or residential schools. He said:

Mentorship is one thing eluding all of us that are leaders in our communities.

We used to mentor because that is how we taught our young people in our community. Now the young people are just blowing in the wind, like fluff in the wind. They are like little eagle fluffs blowing in the wind. Meanwhile, these strong feathers that can withstand the wind, are not helping the young fluff. We have to hang on to them. Teach them how to stand up, talk, be a man, and to act accordingly. If we did that as a whole community then, our suicide rate would go right down because the young people would get the message that we care. We would get back to a more practical way of life, back to being human beings.

Vincent reminded First Nations people and leaders about the importance of knowing their roles and responsibilities, and modeling these in order to assist their youth. He referred to the suicide rate of the youth in First Nations communities. This has been attributed to the loss of spirit of a people caused by several hundred years of colonial government laws and policies.

Shame and blame. One hundred and twenty-five years ago, First Nations people were self-sufficient, self-governing, and in balance and harmony with their environment. First Nations had a vibrant culture, and were a proud people. They had their languages, ceremonies, stories, traditions, values, and beliefs. The European colonial process, using their laws and institutions, destroyed the foundation of a vibrant, growing community. The dilemma in which First Nations people find themselves is: on one hand, they do not fully understand who they are, their culture, and languages; on the other hand, they do not want to become assimilated in mainstream society. In addition, the same opportunities given to mainstream people have not been provided to First Nations people living on reserves. The statistics show that First Nations people are living below the poverty level, have the highest incarceration rates, the highest school drop-out rates, and have the highest suicide rate. This contributes to First Nations people feeling ashamed of who they are. In addition, because they find themselves in a helpless and powerless state, they blame others for their situation. At the same time, they also get blamed for the hopeless state in which they find themselves, thus, perpetuating a vicious cycle of blame.

The participants discussed the issues First Nations communities are facing, and their understanding of the root of the problems. Skywoman said:

We do not have the foundation nor the whole understanding of who we are. We have lost our belief system. The way we were taught does not happen anymore; the sacredness of our community, helping through collectivity is not there anymore. We are living half-way, we do not value our gifts and our gift to life.

Mike stated:

Identity is something that very few people understand. They all say "I am an Indian," but what does it take to be a real one? You have to have that spirituality, know your traditions, understand your beliefs, know all of these in your own mind and to teach these to your children so they can grow up with them.

Bernie said: "There is a syndrome right now where other systems are better then ours."

Skywoman continued:

We have been so assimilated, and it has to do with Christianity. And we are conditioned to be embarrassed and ashamed of who we are, and to believe we are no good. This is why we cannot stand on our own two feet and say, "This is who I am." We have been so brainwashed to the point that we are ashamed of our life and our language.

Charles explained: "In the old days it took the whole community to raise a child.

Now, you tell a youngster committing a misdemeanor; you tell that young person they

should not be doing that, the parents will come down on you. Again, that is another value system they enforced on us as well.” Skywoman went on to say:

Employees get all the blame. Teachers are also blamed. We are shunning our responsibility to educate our own children. We are being selfish; parents leave their children to a babysitter. They are behaving individualistically, they are being selfish. They do not take their responsibility seriously; they do not discipline their children. We need to have a belief system, whether it is through prayer or through spirituality, otherwise we are going to be totally lost.

Charles expressed the following:

Our relationships with our grandparents, our friends; we take all of those things for granted until they are taken away. The reason why I say that is when we lose a loved one. I have gone through that, I lost my son. It really hit me hard. But I have to cope with it. He was loaned to me for a certain time period. You have to remember those types of things. This is a different value system.

Summary

This section first examined the impact of colonial administration on the participants’ understanding of the historical relationships of First Nations and Europeans. Their understanding and experiences of the imposed legislative laws and policies of a foreign rule followed. Finally, the participants reflected on the socio-cultural implications of this colonial process on their community and the problems they are faced with today.

The final section of this chapter addressed the participants' desire for change in their community. The participants discussed community problems resulting from the enforcement and imposition of a different value system. They reflected on their governing systems, organizational structures, and policies. The importance of reviving and honoring their Cree values, beliefs, and philosophies, and incorporating them into every aspect of their community development was shown. Cherrilene explained her hopes of this happening in the following statement:

I have often talked about returning back to some of the basic principles that our forefathers have left us, taught us; and some of those basic principles as First Nations people is to return back to our spirituality. I believe we have lost a lot of our spirituality, the real solid prayer.

Community Development

This section begins with the current realities and the rationale for community development. The reality is that community development in First Nations communities is virtually nonexistent and the mainstream community development model conflicts with First Nations values and beliefs. These conflicts are explored further.

The second part addressed the change process. As the participants spoke of the need for community development, they emphasized the effects of the colonial process and the challenges it poses for making effective changes. In acknowledging that changes need to occur to move from a dependent state to that of independence and interdependence, the participants also identified the restraining forces. They spoke of how crucial it is to free themselves of the colonial impacts and to work on the

resurgence of their philosophies, beliefs, and values which are embedded in their statements and stories.

A word of caution. In reading this section of the chapter, the reader has to recognize that the grounded theory model provided a great deal of leeway to the participants' responses. In honoring their holistic view, some of the themes overlap. At times their responses oscillate from their knowledge and experience of the past, to the present day situation, and their visions of the future. The participants spoke of the past in terms of their culture, traditions, values, beliefs, and their colonial experience. In the present day they spoke of the problems they are facing, relating to issues resulting from the Euro-Canadian colonial influence. Their sharing of the future included the changes required for a better future for their children and those yet to be born.

Community Realities and the Need for Change

Current realities. This section addresses the bleak realities of the lack of community and economic development in the participants' community and the urgency for change. The participants recognized that prior to colonization, community development embraced the traditional way of life. However, community development has been disrupted by the intrusion of foreigners. They acknowledged the need to understand the European language and to take advantage of the European education system, while at the same time ensuring their people do not lose themselves in the process. They recognize the need to anchor themselves in their identity by working with the Elders at the grassroots level. The participants understood the effects of the Federal

government's policies, which have left them voiceless, dependent, and powerless.

Reflecting on the widespread poverty in his community, Bernie shared his views:

"What type of development do we need, particularly when there is 85-95% unemployment and the majority of the people are on welfare?" Skywoman also expressed her view of the current state of community development in her community, and what the community members have to do before they can move forward. She said:

It's like when you abandon a place, you have to go back and clean it up before you can make it livable. That is like our communities today. We have to clean up first, we have to sit down, and we have to put our cards on the table. How do you understand? What do you believe? Who are you? Why were you put on this earth? Why were you born? Why were you born to this land? What are your responsibilities? In your teachings you will always find the answers. We have to indoctrinate our own value system. We have to go back to our basic value systems, but we all have to agree what those basic values are. If we are to find a balance in our present nation building process, we must re-visit our past to find our answers to our not knowing.

Skywoman recounted what the Elders of her community predicted:

The Elders said that we were going to need money because there would be nothing left. They, the Elders, have been saying "You have to go back to the old way." It was the value system they were referring to. They said, "After becoming educated, bring it to the grassroots because you will know their language, and you can express yourself in both languages."

Skywoman advised:

With reference to white man's education, you must always acknowledge it but you must close the gap by using the Elders. If the educators had a tribunal with the Elders, this is where the information and direction would come from. Get as many elders as you can with so many sessions. You will find that many Elders will tell you their lives and experiences where they will discuss how colonialism affected them and their communities. I observe people, and I see that we have gone from one extreme to another, from our grandparent's way to getting an education. They wanted us to have both; the education and to live with the old ways. One must understand who they are because along the way they can get lost. It takes time, and it is a time for fear because many will be threatened. You will discover there are many families who will resist.

In addition, our leaders who have met the requirements of the paternal government have forgotten their pledge of responsibility to maintain the Laws of our ancestral teachings.

Cherrilene recognized the factors involved in resistance to change in her community.

She stated:

Change is going to be very difficult because we are a big First Nation, and we have already adopted the mainstream system. It will be a real big task.

Nevertheless, if we want order on our reserve, we have to adapt our own basic principles and walk our talk.

Power and control is a foreign concept to First Nations people. In order to survive, First Nations have always worked in a collaborative effort. The quality of leadership was based on a servant leadership founded on the values of caring, humility, and reciprocity for the common good. They believed that there was only one Being that had control of their lives, and their world — the Creator.

Conflicting values. The dilemma for First Nations people is that mainstream economic development entails taking resources off the land and making a profit — in direct contrast to First Nations values and beliefs of sharing and reciprocity. They (First Nations) believe that one should only take what is required from the land in order to maintain a balance and harmony.

Vincent said, “We have to do some economic development; but still in our view of the world, we really do not profit from the earth itself because we live in harmony with it.”

Florence added, “We offer back to the earth what we take from it. We offer to the Creator for the things we need, what we ask for.”

Bernie explained his belief that “Mother Earth does not belong to us, we belong to Mother Earth; that is where we come from, and that is where we will go back to.”

Another major difference in the value system of the European and First Nations people is that Europeans value individualism and accumulation of wealth, whereas First Nations believe sharing is one of their core values. Mike, Skywoman, and Charles shared their experiences and beliefs on the values of sharing and caring. Skywoman said:

We have to share, it was given to us. Individualism has taken that away from us. My grandmother used to tell us that it was not given to us to be rich, and that is true. We cannot accumulate wealth if we follow the value of sharing. We will never become millionaires because one of the concepts is to share. Our community used to help; they would be a part of a marriage celebration and would continue to care and counsel the couple afterwards, throughout their marriage. They assisted when a child was born and helped the mother until she got well. The Saddle Lake community still practices sharing. When something happens, they have a good support system because that is how they are. They see what needs to be done and help. They go without question. As a community, they still follow that one path — sharing.

Charles reflected on his childhood memories of how the community members used to share and help each other:

I saw our people working together. They did not place any value on getting any material gain. Rather, they were there to help each other, preparing for the times ahead; and they did it collectively. They shared all these wonderful things together, and they were able to accomplish what it is that they set out to do.

Mike stated his beliefs and the rationale for why it is important to return to the teachings of the Cree:

All this other stuff that we want to store up, we cannot take it with us, anyway. We were born without any clothes on, without any tools in our hands. The tools that we need are in our minds — predetermined what we are going to be.

But, we have to develop these in order for our community to develop. We have to go back; not into a wigwam — we can live where we want to live — but we have to go back to the basics of what life is all about, to the beliefs, to the traditions. Our traditions are full of good things.

Decolonizing Processes

This final section addresses the participants' understanding of the change process and identifies the restraining factors that challenge this process.

Throughout the interviews, all participants referred to the healing that is required in their community and is fundamental to the success in implementing their recommendations.

One hundred and twenty-five years of colonialism has left the First Nations with a legacy of powerlessness, dependency, hopelessness, and bewilderment due to conflicting values. The participants spoke of the current realities of their community. They all expressed hope that through community involvement and the resurgence of the philosophies, beliefs, values, and customs, things can be done to move from dependency to independence and, eventually, to interdependence. The participants continued to reflect on the colonial effects and then made recommendations required to make this shift.

This section is organized around the following themes: (a) current realities, (b) change/time, (c) recommendations for action, (d) education and awareness, (e) leadership, (f) dialogue, (g) healing, (h) resurgence of traditions and ceremonies,

and (i) risk taking. The comments that follow best express the issues related to these themes.

Current realities. In order to make effective changes, the participants spoke of the current realities in the communities. They identified many of the restraining forces challenging them. Bernie said:

We are trying to bring in other systems and sort of overlap them with our traditional way of doing things in our community. You look at leadership the way it is structured nowadays; it is based on power, rather than giving. It is based on status, rather than being visual in the community; and it is based on many other things that we have adopted from our non-native society.

Currently, our leaders do not even have an idea of what culture is all about. And, if you look at the way the system is today, our leaders are not developing their own policies. They are not developing their own systems that would work for us in our community. It is very obvious they are there to administer the policies of Indian Affairs.

Skywoman expressed the following:

It is difficult. The community is much bigger today than yesterday. The mainstream corporate society is constantly pushing our people to use their systems, tools, and methods.

Our people are ill, the community is broken and desperate. This is an obstacle. There must be enough people educated on the reserve who keep their value systems, sense of identity, and [are] proud of themselves. An individual

is bombarded with the duality of the modern and traditional systems and are challenged to unite their purpose in life, belief in their value system, and work in their field.

Bernie added:

Leadership will have to look at the many systems that we have adopted which do not work for us. The things that are missing in our systems in First Nations are the values. Our elders believed that the values had spirit. That spirit comes alive in terms of what we do with our lives. I believe that those were the things that were affected by European systems. We need to revisit that in terms of what should happen in our communities.

Change/time. The problems challenging the community evolved over time.

The participants recognized that making changes will take time. In addition, the participants identified the importance of including community members in this process. The participants acknowledged that one of *the* main restraining forces to change will be the time it will take to introduce the required changes, and to decolonize and empower their community members. Florence said, "I know change takes a lot of time. It takes a lot of people, and sometimes there is a lot of fear; you are dealing with resistance and, in addition, you are trying to move your organization, or at least ensuring that programs are going.

Vincent stated:

We have to take the time and talk with our people, plan, and provide the people service. We should learn from our forefathers who signed the Treaties at

Fortt Pitt and Fort Carleton. They knew it was a big commitment, so they deliberated and sought a vision because they knew they were signing documents that would last forever. We are living in fast times, but we cannot make fast decisions. We have to slow down and have the consensus of the people, ensuring that everybody understands. We have to ask the Creator for guidance because that is what our forefathers did when they signed the Treaties.

It is the right time for change. In our prophecies they state that the churches will fold, they will turn against themselves. Same as the education system. They are always reforming, and the more vocal we can get, the more that we can share our cultural views, our ethnocentricity.

Recommendations. The participants made recommendations that would involve the total community to challenge the effects of the colonial legislated Indian Act. They believe that through a collective, collaborative effort, they can begin to envision a better community for themselves and future generations. They are committed to make a better future for their children. Bernie observed, "There would have to be collaboration between all the organizations in the community, where we would have one common vision, and where we would all work towards that common vision."

Vincent stated:

We have to work collectively. If we cannot do it as Treaties one to ten, then do it individually. We can go to the United Nations, as an independent Nation. Unlike our brothers and sisters in the United States, we were never conquered. We signed Treaties as Sovereign Nation to a Sovereign Nation. Treaties are

what makes us an independent Nation, and we have to start acting like it, too.

We have to break those bonds — the welfare dogma.

Charles said, “People have to take the initiative to change. First off, when our people roamed this land freely, they exchanged everything that Mother Earth had to offer. They would come into conflict with one another but when it was a question of survival, people worked with one another.” Cherrilene added, “The community needs total community involvement to put our own system together. We need to change and bring in better things that work.”

Vincent explained:

If we had nine councillors as headmen who sat around the table in that position, we could make some progress. We would let the managers do their work.

These headmen would do their work, too. Who said headmen cannot be janitors, carpenters, and come once a week to make decisions for their people?

That is what leadership is lacking. We have to set aside our differences, we have to set aside whatever happened. We have to come back to the state of balance, state of equilibrium, and respect each other.

Education and awareness. In order to make effective changes, the First Nations communities have to recognize that they have been colonized; and the social problems, poverty, oppression, and apathy they are experiencing in their community is the result of all the Euro-Canadian oppressive legislature. The participants recommended that education and awareness of all community members is a prerequisite to change. The First Nation members have to heal. They have to know that they can

make changes themselves, and they are responsible to make a better future for the next generation.

Skywoman commented:

We have to indoctrinate our own value systems. How do we honor our Creation, our Creator? Our Elders say it is time to revive all ceremonies.

Presently, women are not involved. We have to go back to our basic value system, but we all have to agree what they are and understand them. You have to understand what does your pipe and your stem represent? When you do, you will understand who you are.

Mike said, "People have to learn to believe that they can do things for themselves, without having things done for them. It will probably take a generation or two to re-educate our people where they will start believing they can do things for themselves."

Bernie stated:

We need cooperation and work within one value system. We need to take over our education and integrate our values into the system. Children should be exposed to ceremonies and to a way of life we had. Children would be able to succeed with pride and dignity because, in our education system, our children will understand who they are and be proud of who they are.

Vincent expressed the following:

It is up to us to educate our young. We have to take over education, teach them cultural teachings, language retention, and keep them physically fit. Youth need

moniyaw [white man's] education but they would also have a background in Native spirituality. Our language embodies our spirit, and if we lose our language, well then we are in for a rough time. We will be no more. Then we will just be brown little white men running around.

Florence explained, "We have to put our governing structure in written format, and share it with leadership and program managers so they can buy into it and begin to use it as models within their organizations. Leaders need to be educated about that process."

Cherrilene added:

We need to create an awareness because a lot of the Chiefs are elected and they are put in the forefront to deal with these things, and half of the time we are not even aware of what is going on. They need to be aware of who they are, their identity first. For example, the word Chief in Cree is *okimahkan*, defined as pretend Chief. *Okimaw* is the real Chief. Yet a Chief is called *okimahkan*.

Leadership. The qualities of leadership the participants envision are those they talked about in the first section of this chapter. These are the traits and qualities that leaders had prior to the implementation of the Indian Act. Cherrilene observed, "The leaders need to get together. They need a unity approach. First and foremost is to try and get the Chiefs to work together, especially in Treaty Six."

Skywoman said:

You can be humble, and yet accomplish a whole lot more than if you were opposite of that. That is the foundation of building your self-esteem. We have

to find one person that gives the protection that we need, the enhancement, the development. One person *esiy pisit* [determined, strong, and lasting], one that is committed to serving their people and to work collectively and ensure that their reserves are not sub-divided. (*Ka piy kenitipahaskehk*).

Florence stated:

We have to stick with prayer, smudging, and those traditional things that we have, to create honest dialogue and use the values of love, caring, sharing for the best interest of our people. I think whoever is a leader should not be individualistic, should not say, "What is in it for me?"; but should say, "What is in it for the people." We have to look after our people, they are first. So, I believe as a leader you are not in leadership because you got the most votes, but because you are meant to serve a purpose, to serve our people and work every day for our people.

Dialogue. Prior to the European colonial experience, all decisions were made by dialogue. All members were considered in the decision-making process and ensured that their voices were heard. The participants expressed their concern that, presently, the Indian Act system does not require any input by the community members. This has left many of the members voiceless. Vincent said, "Dialogue has to start with grass-roots people. There needs to be education about dialogue. Everyone should be given equal rights. If we go back to Societies, then everyone would have equal voice within that society. Everyone needs to have voice."

Florence explained:

It is all the transformation stuff that is required. You have it, then you *transfer* it to another person, and then you have the ripple effect into the community gradually. I know when you say “consensus,” people do not like it because they feel it takes a long time. Consensus always feels better at the end. People give their voice, and the commitment, and then a sense of ownership; all those things happen. Also within consensus, there can be abuse of it where no decisions are made. People need to be accountable.

We have to use models within our community that value the way our forefathers governed. The major block for change is the time it takes and the patience to make relationships. If decisions are made by everybody, then the energy is positive. It allows for change to be ok, and the process is healthy.

My parents were workers, but dad’s opinion was important to the community. Dad was not a leader, but just someone from the community who would be heard, asked about his opinion. It mattered to the people who were leaders. He had a paternal role, but at the same time, mom, the matriarch of the family was honored. Everyone had a role to play, and everybody’s role was important.

Skywoman said:

The challenge to keep the lands and people intact for the expressed purpose of sustaining life is our goal. Furthermore, we assume the responsibility and authority entrusted to mothers, grandmothers and daughters as provided in our Natural Laws, for we are the keepers of the land.

Bernie explained, "I think there needs to be a lot of dialogue happening with our Elders, youth, and our people. These are the resources of our community. That needs to happen in order to better the lives of our children."

Healing. The effects of the residential schooling, where the government and churches removed thousands of children from their parents in order to civilize and Christianize them, has resulted in many soul wounds. This has caused intergenerational wounding. The mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual abuse that took place in those schools were discussed. The next step is to begin the healing process.

Skywoman noted, "We make humor of our sufferings, and I think once you can do that you can heal. It is one part of healing. You can find humor about what happened to you, you can get past that and find humor in it. It is the way to heal."

Vincent stated:

We need to become true helpers in our society because right now there is a lot of healing work that needs to be done. When that process is finished, you will see a lot of change. I am hoping men and women will get together and lead. A lot of young people are searching, and what they come back to is spirituality. There are a few Elders that are really sincere in what they are doing who will provide leadership.

Resurgence of traditions and ceremonies. The assimilationist policies imposed by the Federal government with the intention of cultural genocide has left many First Nations without an identity. In the process of healing, the resurgence of Cree traditions and ceremonies is crucial. Many First Nations are on their healing

journey and wanting to understand their own cultures. The participants all spoke to the importance of their traditions and ceremonies in order to decolonize themselves.

Mike said:

The Creator allowed me to go off-track for a number of years so that I could learn to live our life and find out what kind of help I could provide. My practice and understanding of the ceremonies are they are life-giving. Through them, we are given an opportunity to thank the Creator and the Spirits for their help. There are many ceremonies that we practice today. Some of them are the Chicken Dance, Give Away Ceremony, Pipe Ceremony, Sweat Lodge Ceremony, Fast Ceremony, and the Sundance. These ceremonies are life-giving. Our leadership has to support our traditions and ceremonies.

Once community development descends on community, people start looking at themselves and say, "I need help." That is where the ceremonies will come in; they will understand what ceremonies are for. You should still be aware of who you are and about your heritage and value your heritage. The four principles I believe in are caring, sharing, honesty, and determination. The seven stages of life are happy time, fast time, wondering/search time, truth time, decision time, planting time, and wisdom time. The seven laws are: love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, wisdom, and truth. All of these put together make for a good talking, for a good teaching. It teaches us everything we need to learn about life. We also need to know our traditions, customs, and ceremonies.

Skywoman explained, “We have to change. We have to get together so our people can be proud of something, that which was taken away from us, the good stuff, the basic values and beliefs that we had and still have. If these can spread to reach all, then maybe we can have something to move ahead with.”

Vincent expressed the following:

The more we celebrate who we are, the less tragedies we have in our First Nations. If we do not celebrate, then we do come together in burying our people. If we do not come together in a positive celebration of who we are, the Creator brings us together in burying. The Creator brings us back together in that way.

Bernie said, “I think we need to understand our roots, our values, and the history of our people for us to forge ahead. One way to get back some of our values and beliefs is through our traditions, ceremonies, and our relationships within our community.

Risk taking. The First Nations communities have been dictated to by the hierarchical, paternalistic bureaucracy of Indian Affairs for the last 125 years. This system functions on consistency, control, and predictability, therefore discouraging creativity or risk-taking by First Nations members. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has taken full responsibility to impose whatever policies they feel are right for First Nations. First Nations themselves have very little control over their own lives. The participants spoke to the need to take some risks in order to move away from their present welfare dependency. Bernie noted, “We also have to be risk takers. I

remember the elders praying and thanking the Creator for this day because they would not know if they were going to be here tomorrow. They did the best they could for that particular day, for their families, for the survival of their communities.”

Mike said:

In the past our people were born gamblers. Life depended on gambles, whether or not they did something. They did not have any forecasters amongst them, not the kind we have today. They did not know what the economy was going to be like, what spring break was going to be like. Nothing. We had to depend on the spirit way of life.

Summary

The grounded theory model was used as the research method. Participants were interviewed three different times, and the findings found in this chapter evolved from these interviews. In explaining the Cree World View, the participants described their teachings through stories and the use of the Cree language. The voices of the participants explained the imposition of the Euro-Canadian systems on their community. They provided personal experiences of the colonial policies which left them and their communities in the oppressed and dependent state they find themselves. Finally, the participants spoke with hope that the resurgence of the Traditional Knowledge will enable them to emerge from their present state.

Chapter Five addresses the summary and implications which are drawn from the metaview of the analysis and concludes with recommendations.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

As a First Nations Cree woman, I have always been interested in finding out why our First Nations communities are in a powerless and dependent state. So I began questioning what happened to our once vibrant, self-sufficient, healthy, and harmonious communities, and exploring what we as First Nations people can do about this situation. I began the study with two research questions: first, what are the Cree core values and beliefs; and second, how can these beliefs be used to change our neo-colonial attitudes and then assist us to reshape our governance systems.

Seven First Nations' members from the Saddle Lake First Nations community (four men and three women) were interviewed, and the data were organized in accordance with the grounded theory methodology. This research design led to an interactive study. Through the dialogue process, voice was given to a people whose traditional knowledge has long been suppressed by, and hidden from, mainstream societies. Finally, it is this knowledge, experience, and wisdom of the grassroots First Nations members that are validated and honored in the grounded theory.

Six of the seven interview participants used their first language, Cree (*nehiyawewin*). Language is considered to be the key to traditional knowledge, and it

also offers additional insight into the differences between Euro-Canadian and Cree First Nations paradigms. Therefore, grounded theory methodology was the most appropriate vehicle to distinguish the significant implications and recommendations of this study.

This study provides insights to the Cree world view, the colonial European impact on First Nations communities, and finally, the changes required for effective and meaningful community development. For meaningful change to occur we have to recognize what is ours, what is from others (interference), and how we use what supports our visions and let go of that which is inhibiting our growth and enhancement.

Cree World View

(Eyisikanawapahtamihk Iniyiwaskiy)

Discussion of the Findings

Six of the participants answered questions in this study in the Cree language, interspersed with English. The study captured the essence of the two types of knowledge: story telling (*acimowina*), which relates to the everyday events of the participants' experiences; and their community history and legends (*ahtayokewina*), which are the sacred stories. Sylvia O'Meara (O'Meara & West 1996) expanded on the meaning of sacred stories as follows:

The Algonquian sacred stories contained permanent components, the symbolic, ethical and encoded messages to be passed on to the next generation. These myths were not "invented" but rather retold over the centuries. . . . Many layered messages were encoded in the stories, which were often told to groups

of people of all ages. The elders, or the parents, or the children taking different messages from the stories [sic]. (p. 123)

The stories and legends, relayed through the Cree language, reveal the Cree world view. As the sacred stories (*ahtayokewina*) are told, a movement is initiated in the Spirit world of the unknown introducing actions into the human world of the known. Skywoman, a participant, expressed this phenomenon: “We can never ‘*tipeyimsow-naw*.’ This means we can never be in absolute control over ourselves, as we have the forces of Nature to contend with. Only the Creator is in control.” Therefore, the concept of humans exercising power and control over other humans, land, and the animal kingdom, was foreign to First Nations people. In 1993, Associate Chief Judge Murray Sinclair, an Ojibway, spoke of the contrast between the First Nations and the Christian concept of creation at an Aboriginal justice conference in Saskatoon. His comments were documented by Rupert Ross (1996) in his book, *Returning to the Teachings*:

I am not a biblical scholar, but as I have come to understand it, in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, man occupies a position just below God and his angels, but above all other earthly creation. . . . According to the Genesis account of creation . . . “God said, ‘Let us make man in our image and likeness to rule the fish in the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all wild animals on earth, and all reptiles that crawl upon the earth. . . .’”

. . . In sharp contrast, the aboriginal world-view hold that mankind is the least powerful and least important factor in creation. . . . Mankind's interests are not to be placed above those of any other part of creation.

In the matter of the hierarchy, or relative importance of beings within creation, Aboriginal and Western intellectual traditions are almost diametrically opposed. It goes without saying that *our world-view provides the basis for those customs, thoughts and behaviours we consider appropriate.* (p. 61)

Rupert Ross quoted Basil Johnson who speaks of the Ojibway hierarchy of Creation.

It is not based on intelligence or beauty or strength or numbers. Instead, it is based on dependencies. It placed the Mother Earth (and her lifeblood, the waters) in the first place, for without them there would be no plant, animal or human life. The plant world stands second, for without it there would be no animal or human life. The animal world is third. Last, and clearly least important within this unique hierarchy, come humans. Nothing whatever depends on our survival. (p. 61)

Consequently, the Cree people traditionally live with respect, balance, and harmony with each other and their natural environment, viewing their world from a wholistic view, knowing that disrupting one part of the whole will affect their total environment. They recognize interdependence as a requirement for their own existence and survival. Moreover, the Cree believe that one is born into a family which is a natural extension of the community, thus implying a sense of responsibility toward each member of the

community. Calvin Morrisseau, an Anishinabe author, *Into the Daylight: A Wholistic Approach to Healing* (1992) explained the importance of this relationship in a community by relating the following story:

A young man returned to his community after attending college for a number of years. He was asked by the elders to address the community on what he had learned and to thank them for the opportunity for his education. As he talked he referred to all the things he had learned and often spoke of 'I' or 'me.'

The elders sitting in the group listened patiently while the young man spoke. After a short period of time, one of the elders stood up, cutting the young man off, and spoke to both him and the community. That elder stated that he had listened to the young man and began to reprove him for using the words 'I' and 'me.' He said, "we have sat here and listened carefully to what you were saying. We are discouraged by your words. We have heard you say the word 'I' at least ten times. Do you not remember that those words separate yourself from the rest of us? Do you not realize that in our language, in our beliefs, we are all together? There is no room for 'I' because we are all family. We are all relatives depending upon each other for support and love. My child, each time you say I, you make us feel as if you no longer need us, that somehow your education can replace all the Creator has given us to guide our lives. 'We are afraid for you. We are worried that you will now feel superior to us because we do not have this education. Your words tell us you may have forgotten some important things you learned from us, your teachers. Our

Creator created us as one family, your first family, which includes all of creation, to which we are all connected through our families and our communities. None among us has had to stand alone. We were not superior, nor did we pursue our own interests. We always cared for each other, sometimes putting others needs before our own and only doing what was best for everyone.

‘My son, do you not remember these things? . . . We do this because we depend on each other. It is our responsibility to care for each other. This “I” of which you speak reminds me of greed. It reminds us to be careful not to be greedy and to share what we have. When other men are always asking for things, we ask to be able to give things. Our ceremonies speak to this. When a child receives a name, the parents have a giveaway. In our way, it is the giving which beseeches the honour. It is the receiving which makes us humble.’”

(pp. 9, 10)

This excerpt from Morrisseau’s book aptly illustrates the importance of communal responsibility reflected in the Cree world view. This importance was previously described by Skywoman’s explanation of sin, when she stated, “Sin to us Indian people is different, it is responsibility or lack of responsibility. The first responsibility is to the children, elders, disabled, and the animals.” The Cree word for sin is *pastahowin*, which means stepping over a set of boundaries causing an imbalance, harming the community and/or those children yet to be born. The boundaries emanate from the sacred stories and ceremonies from which the values and beliefs emerge. These statements emphasize the centrality of communal responsibility and sharing as a norm,

and are in contrast to the dominant model of global capitalism that promotes individualism and consumerism.

The ability to speak a First Nations language is an indispensable part of the First Nations identity, as these languages convey a sense of identity, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of spiritual relationship to the universe: plants, animals, Mother Earth, rocks, and people. As an example, Skywoman said, “we are called *iyiniwak*.” The root word *iyini*, means healing. “*Iyiniw*” refers to a First Nations person, and *wak* pluralizes the word. *Iyiniwak* means healing people and is the term Cree First Nations people use to refer to themselves to distinguish themselves from others (all life forms) to convey a sense of identity and purpose. Skywoman further expressed the interconnectedness and responsibility of self and the natural environment by showing how the Cree language is constructed.

We are called *iyiniwak*. This is the foundation of who we are, our identity. We are supposed to heal ourselves and others. *Iyiniwaskamkaw*, it refers to our relationship to our land, that is our connection here. *Iyiniwaskamkohk*, means it is a healing land; the land itself is referred to as Turtle Island, and the turtle is part of healing.

Skywoman further explained, “We have to ask ourselves what is the purpose of why we are here? If you are going to accomplish anything as a First Nation, do not ever separate yourself from who you are.”

Dave Courchene illustrated the importance of finding these answers and acting on them when he said:

In the broader sense, the Creator had a vision in creating the world and, therefore, when placing the humans in their homelands, each was given a responsibility and a gift. The responsibility of the Red People (First Nations) is to be the caretaker of the land, and they were given the gift of spirit.

The Creator gave each of the human races (white, yellow, red, and black) a gift to nurture and eventually share their understanding of the power and wisdom gained by honing their gift. This understanding of First Nations' responsibility is also reflected in Mike's statement, "Our Creator gave us a purpose. We have a real purpose to serve the world. We are the gatekeepers of this country; we were given that responsibility, but healing work is required. The Creator left us to be the gatekeepers of the world, but we have not been doing our job."

Our spiritual relationship to the land is of utmost importance. We acknowledge our bonds to Nature, and our interdependence with plants and animals, all part of Creation. As Bernie explained, "We are part of the land, we are Mother Earth." This is confirmed by Skywoman's comments that, "Our forefathers, this is their land, they were given to this land, the Creator created us to this land so they could live in harmony with the land. That was their connectedness. It was their value system." This connectedness to the spiritual realm and responsibility is entrenched in ceremonies that according to Mike are "life giving." The fundamental requirements in hosting a ceremony are evident in Bernie's understanding that, "We cannot do things alone. We always need people to be a part of what we do." Ceremonies require preparation, planning, collaboration, and community involvement; it is in ceremonies that the roles

of men and women are distinct and strictly observed. Lightning (1992), a Cree person added:

The mutual help in the performance of the ceremony is a manifestation of unity, an acknowledgment that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. When one looks at Cree culture in terms of individuality and unity, one of the things that is particularly impressive is the idea and practice of connectedness, the “belonging” nature of the culture. Individuality and unity are not opposites. The whole is figured in terms of the family, not only as in the immediate family or extended family, but as universal family, with God as the father. When that is elaborated in all its complexity there is an identity with creation. We can speak of Nature as being us. (p. 247)

Implications of Cree Worldview

Our identity as First Nations people is threatened and, in order to survive, the resurgence of First Nations languages and ceremonies must be a priority in all communities. By following the Natural Laws given to us by the Creator, we can begin to restore the concept of our identity and humanity, then our responsibilities to our families and communities, and, eventually, to the global community. Presently, the ceremonies reflect these teachings, and each ceremony has a sacred story (*ahtayoke-wina*) by which the spiritual teachings are taught. In living the ceremonial way, we get harmony, and we develop systems that will reflect this belief. The importance of the resurgence of our cultural traditions are crucial to our very existence as Cree First Nations people. As Goehring (1996) wrote:

For there to be a future for Indigenous societies, there must be a basic and fundamental need for those societies to continue to exist. There must exist a cultural coherence that is able to adapt to the new world. There must be a strong and expressed desire to bring cultural values from the old world into the new, and to meet the demands this new world will inevitably impose. (pp. 50, 51)

Sherri Chisan (1992) cautioned, “If we do not retain the lessons of our ancestors we become isolated as generations, bringing little from the past and leaving little for the future.” This transmission of culture and knowledge must recognize that our knowledge is as valid and as important today as it was prior to European arrival. Chisan further quoted a First Nations elder, Vera Martin, who recognized “the journey back along the path of our ancestors picking up what they have left beside the trail — language and cultural teachings.”

The key to maintaining our culture is ensuring that the First Nations’ languages are intact, because, as Tom Porter (1998) explained, “Linguists say one’s language is 50% to 60% of one’s tradition and culture. If that’s the case, when we lose our language we lose 50% to 60% of who we are as an ethnic people” (p. 35).

The understanding of our gift of spirit and our responsibility to the land, animals, and cosmos is embedded in the language, and the traditional knowledge that guides our daily lives dwells in the ceremonies. In ceremonies, we experience the Natural Laws of caring, sharing, honesty, and determination individually and

collectively. Undoubtedly, First Nations ceremonies contribute to harmony with our fellow humans, the universe, and spiritual realm.

The Turtle Teachings, presented as an overlay in Figure 7, depict the inter-relationships between values, beliefs, and philosophies of the Cree. These Turtle Teachings are all encompassing of how the Cree people conduct their lives. The open traditional organization structure is derived from all of these teachings. It identifies the way the community organized itself, with specific responsibilities to each of its members. Further, the organizational structure allows for collaboration, cooperation, and open communication. The circle allows everybody's voice to be heard. The teachings include the purpose, relationships, and structure that guide the Cree First Nations. The core is the Traditional Knowledge. This knowledge included the spiritual teachings given to them by the Creator. These teachings include the

Figure 7. Wholistic overview of Cree traditional knowledge.

relationships to the elements (air, water, fire, and earth), and the Natural Laws of caring, sharing, honesty and determination. The Turtle Teachings continue to guide us in ceremony to stay on the path given to the *Iyiniwak*, Cree First Nations.

Colonial Impacts

(*Moniyaw siycikewina ekwa mina siwepisowina ka pahtakonikweyahk*)

Moniyaw refers to Europeans (whitemen). *Siycike* means the act of making, or deciding; *siycikewina* are statutes, laws, or policies. Therefore, *moniyaw siycikewina* are those statutes and laws that are decided and implemented by whitemen. *Ekwa mina* means “and also.” *Siwepisiwina* refers to the characteristics or behaviors. In this sentence it refers to the European characteristics and behaviours. *Ka* means “that.” *Pahtakon* is the act of restraining. *Pahtakonikweyahk* is translated to mean those (with reference to Euro-Canadians) who restrain all of us.

Discussion of the Findings

All participants of this study reflected on their experiences and spoke about the shift from living in an interdependent state to that of dependency on a foreign colonial system. The gradual imposition of a foreign value system has resulted in impoverishment (material and spiritual) and a pervasive sense of hopelessness in all of Canada's First Nations' communities. How we arrived in this state is best described in the following metaphor by Daniel Quinn (1996):

Systems thinkers have given us a useful metaphor for a certain kind of human behaviour in the phenomenon of the boiled frog. The phenomenon is this. If you drop a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will of course frantically try to

clamber out. But if you place it gently in a pot of tepid water and turn the heat on low, it will float there quite placidly. As the water gradually heats up, the frog will sink into a tranquil stupor, exactly like one of us in a hot bath, and before long with a smile on its face, it will unresistingly allow itself to be boiled to death. (p. 258)

Euro-Canadian systems and institutions continue to impose the colonial values and beliefs of individualism and materialism on First Nations in an insidious and systematic way. For this purpose, the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), a paternalistic, hierarchical, and bureaucratic structure, ensures the colonial government's policies are enforced consistently, routinely, and methodically. Its primary function is to maintain control over First Nations people throughout Canada.

The Canadian government sanctioned its power and control over all First Nations and their reserve lands by legislating the Indian Act (1876). Engelstad and Bird (1999) wrote:

In 1876, the federal government passed its first Indian Act "the first consolidation of the laws pertaining to Indians." The Indian Act was passed by the federal government because it had exclusive legislative responsibility for Indians and lands reserved for Indians, but First Nations themselves had no input into it. (p. 8)

The participants expressed their knowledge and experience of how a mechanistic and systematic approach was utilized to effectively destroy First Nations families. Initially, it was done through the introduction of paternalism because it was a European

paradigm which ensured power and control rested with men. As a result, the matrilineal practices of the Cree First Nations were displaced. Vincent, a participant of this study, said:

Men have been given the authority by the European belief system for the past 500-600 years. Our society today is a patriarchal society based on the trading practices of the Hudson's Bay and Northwest traders. Those colonists did not have respect for women and our societies. They still do not. The consequence of the fur trade one hundred years prior to the signing of the Treaties was that our societies changed from a matriarchal society to a patriarchal society. Instead of headmen being chosen with the power of recall [which was the women's role], it became a [male dominated] hereditary system.

The Europeans were interested only in these functions of Cree Society which they recognized as contributing directly to their economic activity. They ignored or denied the social aspect, ignored the balance inherent in the Cree Society, in the balance of responsibilities between men and women. In addition, the displacement of the matrilineal with a paternalistic form of government has caused other major problems.

Morrisseau (1992) explained the importance of women in the First Nations community:

Our women are the givers of life and deserving of respect. From an Anishinabe perspective, striking out against a woman is like striking out against everything we hold sacred: our life, our future, our customs, and beliefs; because our women represent the power which is contained within all these concepts. By weakening women, we are weakening our people. (p. 40)

In effect, for many years, the Indian Act ensured that women were subservient to men. The result has been a shift in roles and responsibilities of men and women. Children were also targeted by colonial legislation.

The Canadian government's policy of assimilation and indoctrination of First Nations' children into mainstream values, was done through the construction of residential schools across Canada, with administrative funds being provided to the churches to proceed with the christianizing and schooling of all First Nations children. These mainstream institutions supported policies that contributed to a form of cultural and spiritual genocide. In expediting the process, they had to remove the children from their families and "de-indianize" them. Hence, the government, with the cooperation of the churches, used these residential schools to try to destroy the culture, language, and spirituality of the Cree people.

The replacement of our traditional economy with a money economy has also caused many problems. Mercerdi (as cited in Jackson and Sanger, 1998) spoke of the dilemma First Nations people experience when using this system of economy. "The introduction of money has unfortunately helped to break down traditional values, and has served to accelerate our assimilation into the mainstream society" (p. 66).

Charles expressed the divisive impact of a money economy on First Nations communities:

We cannot work together because one of the main barriers is the issue of money. Money is foreign to our people. It seems to be a predetermining factor as to how people are going to work together. The government has used this

very effectively. . . . The dominant society has a different value system. They will do anything to create and retain wealth, even to the point of destroying mother nature, water and air, creating pollution and contamination. In destroying Mother Earth, you destroy all humanity.

Knudtson and Suzuki (1997) expanded on the western perspective of land ownership that is in stark contrast to the spiritual bond that binds First Nations people to Mother Earth:

In the dominant culture of the West, we regard property, ownership, possessions, and wealth as natural goals and rights of all citizens. . . . In the spiritually detached Western view of nature, land is lifeless . . . to be surveyed, subdivided, and zoned. It is a commodity — valuable, but no more “sacred” than a stack of cedar logs, heap of coal, or any other economic resource. It is a financial investment — to be bought, “developed,” and resold (hopefully at a handsome profit) by shuffling official titles and deeds. (p. 121)

The European attitude of the time can best be described as a parochial world view which Adler (1997) elaborated on: “Parochialism means viewing the world solely through one’s own eyes and perspective. A person with a parochial perspective neither recognizes other people’s different ways of living and working nor appreciates that such differences have serious consequences” (p. 10). Through their lenses, the colonizers saw virgin lands and untapped resources. Supported by their belief in the right to a capitalistic economy and private ownership of land and its resources, the colonizers displaced First Nations from their lands. Their rationalization for the exploitation of

lands range from the belief in Manifest Destiny to that of racial and cultural superiority over First Nations people. As a result, the colonizers created the reserve system to isolate First Nations from the mainstream. With the evidence of sickness among First Nations people, the colonial government believed First Nations would eventually die off, and with the Indian Act legislation they would continue assimilating the surviving First Nations into the mainstream.

Implications

This study identifies the importance for all people to become aware of the colonial effects; to be conscious of the colonial mechanisms imposed on First Nations; and, through this critical understanding, to know they have the option of informed choices.

The effects of centuries of colonization have caused our communities to be in an oppressed condition: voiceless, helpless, apathetic victims, living below the poverty level, dependent on government handouts. First Nations must recognize that mainstream society has chosen to deny responsibility for these conditions. The historic and current details of these conditions are beyond the scope of this study.

Many First Nations communities are administering their programs constrained by the legislative, policy, and financial frameworks of the colonizing federal government. As a result, First Nations leaders are preoccupied with the tedious administrative everyday issues which prevent them from becoming true visionary leaders. We also find ourselves in a predicament where the colonizers are now at arms-length, but continue to maintain their power; imposing their laws, systems, and institutions,

directing the lives of First Nations people. The next phase of the mechanistic approach to colonization is that First Nations will unwittingly become their own neo-colonizers (the oppressed becoming their own oppressors). This newly-created First Nations administered neo-colonial paternalistic bureaucracy continues the historical trend of assimilating First Nations into the mainstream systems. Unchallenged, this phenomenon will lead to the cultural and spiritual genocide of Canada's First Nations.

Greenleaf (1991) described the consequences of this bureaucracy:

To be a lone chief atop of pyramid is abnormal and corrupting. None of us are perfect by ourselves, and all of us need the help and correcting influence of close colleagues. When someone is moved atop a pyramid, that person no longer has colleagues, only sub-ordinates. . . . The pyramidal structure weakens informal links, dries up channels of honest reaction and feedback, and creates limiting chief-subordinate relationships which, at the top, can seriously penalize the whole organization. (p. 63)

However, First Nations leaders can challenge this phenomenon in adopting the posture of Dr. Deming who states 98% of the problem is the system as explained in *The Fifth Discipline* (Senge, 1990).

Because the government legislation led to cultural and spiritual genocide and implemented by state-sanctioned institutions (churches, schools, legislation), leadership must be critical of the structures currently used in our community. The types of structures created can also dictate the results. Michelle Fine, in *Mentoring the Mentor:*

A Critical Dialogue with Paulo Freire (Fraser et al., 1997), explained the results of such systems:

Bureaucratic structures force a silencing of possibility and an exiling of critique. Bureaucracy has no room for critical consciousness, from children or adults. Its tacit job is to surround and contain critique, and so the voicing of critical consciousness provokes institutional exporting of children's and adults' bodies and spirits. Silencing is not simply a feature of this institutional life — it is the defining feature. (p. 92)

Referring to the ineffectiveness of institutions, Greenleaf (1991) expressed the following opinion: "Governments rely too much on coercion and too little on persuasion, leadership, and example. . . . they too often impose upon society a bureaucracy that is oppressive and corrupting. Rarely does conceptual and inspired leadership come from government" (p. 53). Presently, the elections systems dictated by the Indian Act directs the type of leadership in our communities. Lee (1997) identified some of the problems in the election process as the following:

The most well known people may not necessarily be the best folks to have in positions of formal leadership responsibility. They may be popular, but may not have the personal or organizational skills necessary. The experienced person may indeed bring a very top-down, elitist view of a community organization or participation. Elections can begin a process of subtly splitting the community into in-group and out-group, winners and losers. Elections can suggest to

people that the elected folks are now the ones that will do all the work and have all the answers. (p. 84)

The election process condones leadership to become alienated from their members shortly after they get elected into power. Vincent commented, "People get elected into office and, all of a sudden, there is a separation. They are behind closed doors making decisions, they are not with the people anymore. Chief and Council is a power structure that was put there through the Indian Act." Colonizers such as the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada make it appear that First Nations have some control and power over our own governance, but in reality First Nations are essentially administrators of federal government programs. "We are administering our own poverty," stated Bernie. Furthermore, this mechanistic approach keeps First Nations people powerless, divided, stratified, and voiceless in our own communities.

In the midst of this administrative role, First Nations leaders are also faced with the colonial impact. The participants all spoke of the devastation of their communities characterized by social problems such as high unemployment rates, suicide, alcohol and drug abuse, and loss of parenting skills. All the participants spoke of the dilemma with which First Nations leaders are faced. They want to make changes but are at the mercy of the federal government's bureaucratic policies. They also spoke of the need for individual, family, and community healing. Morrisseau (1992) explained:

As our culture began to change, our whole system of sharing and interdependency slowly began to shift towards an individualistic perception of life. This shift, in turn, destroyed the sacred ties that connected our families and

communities with one another. . . . This painful cycle appears to take the form where the individual, the family, and their community become alienated from each other's existence. (p. 6)

Skywoman also pointed out that, "Our people are ill, the community is broken and desperate."

In order to free ourselves of the colonial systems, and implement leadership or achieve strength through change, it is vital for First Nations people to understand our own culture, language, beliefs, values, and philosophies as explained by the participants of this study. Once we understand these things and the colonial experience, we will no longer feel ashamed, nor will we blame ourselves for believing that there is a defect in our culture or in being a First Nations person. Participants responses clearly indicate that many First Nations members have adopted European values and believe these to be superior to our own cultural values and beliefs. In *Pathways to Self-Determination: Canadian Indians and the Canadian State* (Littlenear et al., 1985), M. Smallface Marule expanded further on the implications of this deep seated sense of inferiority:

Indians are currently in the stage, identified by Fanon, where we believe that we are an inferior people. This sense of inferiority is evident in the way we are negotiating the terms of Indian government with the Canadian government. There is an underlying attitude that we have nothing of value in our communities, that the good things are to be found outside of our communities, that we must have federal officials tell us what to do. (p. 43)

Bernie added that:

Leadership will have to look at the many systems that we have adopted which do not work for us. The things that are missing in our systems in First Nations are the values. Our elders believed that the values had spirit. That spirit comes alive in terms of what we do with our lives. I believe those were the things that were affected by European systems. We need to revisit that in terms of what should happen in our communities.

Without any question, one also has to understand the root of the problem of First Nations: that the European belief system of individualism, accumulation, and capitalism have contributed significantly to the methodical and deliberate destruction of many of the First Nations culture, belief systems, and values.

The voices of the participants explained the imposition of the European systems on their community. They provided personal experiences of the colonial policies which left them and their communities in the oppressed and dependent state they find themselves.

Community Development

(Mamawekamahtowinihk kochi pahminsoyahk)

Discussion of the Findings

All the participants of this study believe that we have the power within ourselves to make the changes that will reflect who we are as Cree First Nations people. In the previous section we looked at the colonial impact and its effects on *mamawekamahtowinihk kochi pahminsoyahk*, which means “from the action of working together we care for our own lives.” The challenge provided to our communities is that, as

Cherrilene said, "We have to use a unity approach." This would result in total community participation to identify the community vision, and further establish processes to be used in getting there. All participants expressed a strong desire for change that will reflect our core cultural beliefs and values towards building a healthy, harmonious, and self-sufficient community.

In order to move our First Nations people towards change, we must learn and understand our past while acknowledging the beliefs and traditions that serve to develop community. Bernie expressed, "I think we need to understand our roots, our values, and the history of our people for us to forge ahead. One way to get back some of our values and beliefs is through our oral traditions, ceremonies, and our relationships within our community." "We have to go back. Not into a wigwam. We can live where we want to live. But, we have to go back to the basics of what life is all about, to the beliefs, to the traditions," stated Mike. Skywoman added:

We have to change. We have to get together so our people can be proud of something, that which was taken away from us, the good stuff, the basic values and beliefs that we had and still have. If these can spread to reach all, then maybe we can have something to move ahead with.

The Natural Law, caring, honesty, sharing, and determination, are the foundation of this development. Our traditional ceremonies model the pathway of our community development. Our ceremonies involve reciprocity, egalitarianism, collective individualism, unity, collaboration, participatory democracy, relationship, and servant leadership. These are grounded in a philosophy shaped from the spirit of

the land and a belief that the environment, cosmos, plant, animal, and human realms are all equal and interconnected. Our traditional governance practices, therefore, are flattened, webbed, circular structures which include dialogue processes to provide a voice for all community members.

All participants of this study spoke of capacity building and healing as the keys to move community development. It should be carried out on our terms, not on foreign community and economic development models. The following section describes the bundle of rights which directs our Nation building through a total community development process. This bundle of rights includes our relationship with the land, our Treaties, our leadership, and finally, our Laws, all grounded in our Cree beliefs, values, and philosophies.

Our relationship to the land. “The challenge to keep the lands and people intact for the expressed purpose of sustaining life is our goal. Furthermore, we assume the responsibility and authority entrusted to mothers, grandmothers, and daughters as provided in our Natural Laws, for we are the keepers of the land,” stated Skywoman. Snow, in *The Cultural Maze: Complex Questions on Native Destiny in Western Canada* (Friesen, 1991), explained further:

Indian oral history includes many teachings which bring purpose to Indian existence. The Indian people know they have been created for a special purpose. It is believed that there is a time coming in the future when Indian people will be needed in this land. Because of this need and the spiritual tie to the land the Indian people will continue to exist and will continue to struggle to survive.

These teachings precede the written word of this land. The Indian people have been created as stewards of this land which is a role they will continue to uphold. (p. 138)

Mercerdi, in *Dismantling Democracy: Multi-Lateral Agreement on Investment and Its Impact* (Jackson & Sanger, 1998), added that, "The relationship between us, the land and the Creator continues to guide our behaviour" (p. 65). Our First Nations perspectives must always be at the core of all decisions we make regarding our Mother Earth. Mercerdi quoted Blackfoot Nation's Chief Crowfoot, who made the following statement in 1877 to the Treaty Commissioners:

Our land is more valuable than your money. It will last forever. It will not even perish by the flames of fire. As long as the sun shines and waters flow, this land will be here to give life to men and animals. We cannot sell the lives of men and animals. It was put here for us by the Great Spirit and we cannot sell it because it does not belong to us. (p. 64)

First Nations relationship to the land is one of reciprocity and respect. As Bernie said, "It is a nurturing land. How we treat it will always come back to us and our future generations." This is echoed by Florence's statement, "When you take something from Mother Earth, you give back something in return." If one is not connected to the land, it is simpler to continue abusing the land for its resources without taking responsibility for the consequences on the future generations. A Cree saying is, "Only when the last fish is caught, only when the last tree has been cut, and only when the last river has been poisoned, only then will people realize you cannot eat money."

Our treaties. “As long as the sun shines, rivers flow, and grass grows. . . ,” so said the Treaty Commissioners about the length of time that our Treaty agreement would be valid. Here, our four direction teachings are guarding our Treaties: The Sun, with the gift of life, Thunderbird with the gift of water, the Bear with sweetgrass, and the Wind, through speaking of these things.

The first official document used to make legal claim to First Nations land in Western Cree territory was the Royal Proclamation of 1763, on which the Treaty-making process is founded. This Proclamation was the first British Crown document to affirm sovereignty of First Nations, and it benefitted the First Nations because it provided one of the strongest guarantees of Aboriginal land rights.

Equally important, the Treaties were signed between the Crown of Great Britain and First Nations leaders in the late 1800s. The participants understood that their ancestors signed this Treaty on a Nation-to-Nation basis. First Nations peoples’ understanding of the Treaty promises was that reserve lands were set aside for them to practice their way of life and their spiritual traditions and to provide protection from the further encroachment by European settlers. The rest of our lands, to the depth of the plow, were made available to share with settlers. Mercerdi (as cited in Jackson & Sanger, 1998) said, “Our people and Nations have never surrendered their political sovereignty to the colonizer. An aspect of inherent self-determination, is the historical convention that sees and treats us as nations of peoples” (p. 69).

Our leadership. In order to accomplish the task of community development, the participants identified the way First Nations organized themselves prior to European

influence and identified the characteristics and traits required of today's leaders to make responsible and effective changes. The participants recalled traditional leadership traits prior to the imposition of the Indian Act election by-laws. They all stated that leaders were grounded in their spirituality, from which they became visionaries. They maintained their roles as servant and transformational leaders.

Bernie explained the traits of traditional leaders, which are the same traits required to move the community forward:

Leaders were chosen for their strong spiritual beliefs, they were also very kind, caring and sharing. The people would come first, and they [the leaders] would come last. They would take care of their people in all ways. They were well-disciplined within themselves. They were visionary leaders. They knew what to do. They knew what was coming. They believed in the Higher Power, who guided them every day, plus they believed that the Spirits would also guide them.

Cherrilene expressed a similar understanding of leadership: "I have often talked about returning back to some of the basic principles that our forefathers have left us; and some of those basic principles as First Nations people is to return back to our spirituality."

Before First Nations leaders can be effective, we must overcome some of the imposed European values. As Skywoman noted, "Today, politics are separate from spirituality." Block (1996) wrote, "Spirituality as the process of living out a set of deeply held personal values, of honoring forces or a presence greater than ourselves.

It expresses our desire to find meaning in, and to treat as an offering, what we do”

(p. 48). Our communities need to honor our traditional way of developing visionary leaders. Sharma (1998) expounded on the criteria for visionary leadership:

Visionary leaders care more about doing what’s right than appearing intelligent.

Leadership is not about popularity, it’s about integrity. It’s not about power,

it’s about purpose. And it’s not about title but rather talent. Visionary leaders

see themselves as liberators rather than limiters of human talent. Their primary

priority is to develop their people’s full potential. (p. 68)

In addition, servant leadership has been a traditional way of leading, whereby the total communities interests were always taken into consideration, and the leader’s responsibility was to ensure that the camp was in harmony and balance. Skywoman explained:

It was the headman and keepers that were the nucleus of the circle. They were chosen by the people to keep the four directions. A long time ago when they chose a leader, it was almost like that person was spiritual. He had two or three of those four directions. He was a good hunter, he shared, and he knew about his people, about their emotional and physical hurts. He recognized that. He helped his people, he never got tired of his position or anything. The head chief would go out to feed all his people when something was brought, and whatever little was left, he kept for himself.

In order to practice servant leadership, the participants spoke of the need to move from transactional leadership introduced by the foreign system, to

transformational leadership. Transformational leadership ensures that people are provided with the opportunities to be involved in, and take responsibility for, themselves and for the future generation. Florence expressed her experience on the results of transformational leadership as: “It is all the transformation stuff that is required. You have it, then you transfer it to another person, and then you have the ripple effect into the community gradually. . . . We have to use models within our community that value the way our forefathers governed.” Moreover, all participants echoed the need for all First Nations to be educated to honor their own cultural teachings so they can begin to dialogue, bring voice to their pain, and then move on to their community development. Using our gifts of spirit, the spirit given to the Red People, we must heal our own people first and foremost. Vincent stated:

We need to become true helpers in our society because right now there is a lot of healing work that needs to be done. When that process is finished, you will see a lot of change. I am hoping men and women will get together and lead. A lot of young people are searching, and what they come back to is spirituality.

It is our community leaders’ responsibility to make effective changes in their communities. Present day leadership must first and foremost recognize that community healing is a prerequisite to any action. Referring to the plight of First Nations communities, Morrisseau (1992), an Anishinabe author, stressed the universal need to heal ourselves:

Strong leadership is the key factor in healing our communities. Without strong leadership, those who are unwilling to face the realities of our situation will

continue to be lost. We are in the midst of overcoming six generations of oppression which have left our families in shambles, our young men without vision, our old men without wisdom, our women without power, and our children without a future. Facing this is paramount in bringing those still lost into healing. Our families need to relearn many of the things they have been taught about ourselves and our parenting. We need to recognize that within our communities lie the answers to all of our hardships and that recognizing those hardships is the first step towards community healing. (p. 79)

Our laws. It is vital that First Nations return to our teachings and knowledge of our governance systems prior to the European influence. "We had a system of government that was holistic and maternal in nature," stated Vincent. The development of our own institutions which have as our foundation our own values, beliefs, and philosophies will provide a voice to the grassroots people, empowering us to take responsibility for ourselves, our children, and our communities.

A circular, webbed, flattened, structure will replace the present paternalistic, hierarchical, and bureaucratic system, eliminating power and control by a select few and a one-way flow of communication. This traditional open organizational structure will ensure that all information is shared through a consensus decision model. Information is power.

First Nations Constitutions, Acts, By-laws, and policies will enhance and move our own communities forward. Community development must be based on what we know of our roles and responsibilities as stewards of the land, using our gifts of spirit.

Based on this, First Nations leaders can begin to heal and develop our own people first and foremost. We then can identify the kind of development required without implementing the consumer and profit driven European economic systems.

The Hau de no sau nee's address to the Western World in Geneva (Akwesasne Notes, 1978) stated:

In accordance with our ways, we are required to hold many kinds of feasts and ceremonies which can best be described as "give-aways." It is said that among our people, our leaders, those whom the Anglo people insist on calling "chiefs," are the poorest of us. By the laws of our culture, our leaders are both political and spiritual leaders. They are leaders of many ceremonies which require the distribution of great wealth. As spiritual/political leaders, they provide a kind of economic conduit. To become a political leader, a person is required to be a spiritual leader, and to become a spiritual leader a person must be extraordinary generous in terms of material goods.

Our basic economic unit is the family. The means of distribution, aside from simple trade, consists of a kind of spiritual tradition manifested in the functions of the religious/civic leaders in a highly complex religious, governmental, and social structure. (p. 7)

Implications

Our First Nations perspective. The new Canadian government initiatives in the areas of education, economics, and governance are simply new forms of colonialism designed to smother our cultures and assimilate our people. It is important to maintain

our cultures as vital and valid alternatives to colonialism and Euro-Canadian culture in order to ensure the survival of our people. In recognizing our basic human right to survive as a people with distinct cultures, we need to acknowledge and exercise our right to educate our children ourselves, and not leave their education to others. It is not just our right but our responsibility to do so. In order for First Nations cultures and languages to survive, we First Nations people have to work to decolonize ourselves, and to do so we must first understand what colonialism is and how it has affected us. Active promotion of dialogue and decision making through consensus at the community level is the most effective and essential tool for educating and decolonizing our people.

Our land. Unless mainstream institutions can begin to understand other paradigms, they will continue to do what they have always done. Through the use of their power and control, they will eventually destroy themselves, the earth and everything around them. This sentiment is reflected in the *Basic Call to Consciousness* (Akwesasne Notes, 1978) issued by the Hau de no sau nee (Six Nations Confederacy):

The original instructions direct that we who walk about on the Earth are to express a great respect, an affection, and a gratitude toward all the spirits which create and support Life. We give a greeting and thanksgiving to the many supporters of our own lives — the corn, beans, squash, the winds, the sun. When people cease to respect and express gratitude for these many things, then all life will be destroyed, and human life will come to an end. (p. 7)

With the understanding of their stewardship of the land, First Nations members reiterate the importance of keeping their roles as gatekeepers of the land. Once more the Hau de no sau nee expressed this stewardship eloquently, as:

Our roots are deep in the lands where we live. We have great love for our country, for our birthplace is there. The soil is rich from the bones of thousands of our generations. Each of us were created in those lands, and it is our duty to take care of them, because these lands will spring the future generations of the Ongwehonwe. We walk about with a great respect, for the Earth is a very sacred place. (p. 7).

Treaties. Treaty Six First Nations, through virtue of the Treaty signing of 1876, have a legal presence in Canada. As our ancestors of the past, we must take control of our own lives; making decisions regarding the development of our own sovereign constitutions, and institutions without further interference from a foreign government.

It is our spirituality that provides the bedrock for our focus in Nation building. We as First Nations can take a pro-active stance in practicing our Nationhood through Nation building activities such as returning to our ceremonial grounds, and creating and designing national activities to bring our people together.

Leadership. Determined and visionary leadership is needed which will cooperate and collaborate with the people. The change process will require a total community approach. In order to transform our people to take ownership, empowerment must be made through public dialogue. Sharing ideas can assist in dealing with

our difference and generate relationship building. Dialogue leads to consensus and, through consensus, we will find a common vision for our future. As a collective, our people can make informed and meaningful decisions. Our leaders will urge us to share in this process. Indeed, it is in the very act of decolonizing that our true leaders emerge. Morrisseau (1992) stated, "Our leadership must begin to address issues through an honest sharing of concern. Community members must begin to take part in that process, and our leaders need to hear what the members of their communities are saying" (p. 79). The whole community practicing dialogue and consensus decision making to work towards a common community vision is essential to bring about change. Bernie stated: "I think there needs to be a lot of dialogue happening with our Elders, youth and our people. These are the resources of our community. That needs to happen in order to better the lives of our children." Florence also explained, "Consensus always feels better at the end. People give their voice, and the commitment, and then a sense of ownership. All those things happen."

Voice must be given to our stories. Healing must take place. Dialogue by talking and listening to reach decisions by consensus must be revived. It is vital for the survival of our culture that we first know our history. In understanding our history, it liberates us in that we begin to understand what has become of our people. We know that it is not some defect in our nature or culture, but rather as a result of actions on the part of the colonizers.

In addressing the issue of the colonial effects on First Nations people, we need to first recognize the dehumanizing effect of colonialism on both the colonizers and the

colonized. In order to accomplish this, developing relationships that honor the spirit, dignity, worth, and value of all humanity is a requirement. This can be done by first recognizing, and then developing, critical thinking of the colonial relationship. As we raise our awareness of the colonial relationship, we can see how we have taken on the roles of the colonizers.

The participants of this study aptly described the colonial impacts. Their level of consciousness is exceptional in comparison to the norm among First Nations and mainstream Canada. Each of these participants embodies the desirable characteristics that were discussed by all of them in their knowledge of traditional leaders. They all have a strong sense of identity. They speak the Cree language and are traditional knowledge carriers involved in ceremonial and spiritual beliefs. All are actively engaged in community development, using their visionary skills, and committed to the resurgence of language and ceremony. All are exceptional communicators, and throughout the study, their sense of humor was to be admired. They often made light of the many difficult experiences they reported. Skywoman stated, "We make humor of our suffering, and I think once you can do that you can heal. It is one part of healing. You can find humor about what happened to you, you can get past that and find humor in it. It is the way to heal."

Spirituality, the highest form of political consciousness, is our bundle of rights which directs our Nation building through our community development processes. Treaty Six First Nations, through virtue of the Treaty signing of 1876, have a legal presence in Canada. As did our ancestors of the past, we must take control of our own

lives; making decisions regarding the development of our own sovereign constitutions, and institutions, without further interference from a foreign government. "The challenge to keep the lands and people intact for the expressed purpose of sustaining life is our goal. Furthermore, we assume the responsibility and authority entrusted to mothers, grandmothers, and daughters as provided in our Natural Laws, for we are the keepers of the land," stated Skywoman. Colonial attitudes and practices are still prevalent today, aimed at cultural genocide; racism, the Indian Act, and the Canadian government's "Self-Government Initiative" are a few examples. The key is learning to recognize colonialism in both its subtle and blatant forms. The whole community practicing dialogue and consensus decision working towards a common community vision is essential to bring about change. Determined and visionary leadership is needed which will cooperate and collaborate with the people.

Summary

First Nations were put on this land by the Creator and were given responsibilities and laws for living in harmony. As Sovereign Nations with the inherent rights in this land, First Nations entered into Treaties with the Crown of Great Britain. These Treaties between Nations form the basis of the legal relationship between First Nations and Canada. Through virtue of the signing of Treaty Six between the Crown of Great Britain and the First Nations, we, the indigenous people have a legal presence in Canada. The grounded theory research approach has been used to answer the two research questions of this study: identifying the Cree core values and beliefs in order to find a balance in our present Nation building processes. Seven First Nations members,

all of whom are leaders from the Saddle Lake First Nations reserve, participated in this study which provided insights to the Cree world view, the colonial European impact on First Nations communities, and the changes required for community development.

The understanding of our gift of spirit and our responsibility to the land is embedded in the Cree language, and the traditional knowledge that guides our daily lives dwells in the ceremonies. In ceremonies, we individually and collectively experience the Natural Laws of love, sharing, honesty, and determination which expresses harmony with all humanity and the spiritual realm. The voices of the participants explained that the imposition of the European systems of individualism, accumulation, and capitalism have contributed significantly to the methodical and deliberate destruction of the core values and beliefs of the First Nations culture. They provided personal experiences of the colonial policies which have left them and their communities in the oppressed and dependent state they find themselves. However, a resurging force towards reclaiming our gift and our responsibility as First Nations people will lead to Nation building with traditional knowledge at the heart of this renewal.

Spirituality, the highest form of political consciousness, is our bundle of rights which directs our Nation building through our community development processes. As did our ancestors of the past, we must take control of our own lives; making decisions regarding the development of our own sovereign constitutions, and institutions, without further interference from a foreign government.

The primary purpose of this study was to bring forth the First Nations wisdom and voice of grassroots people to re-create healthy communities that are economically and politically strong.

Recommendations for Further Research

Presently, the Cree language is spoken by 15% of our population in the Saddle Lake First Nations. Language is the invisible carrier of a Nation's identity. The first recommendation is a study to develop methods for teaching the Cree language to Cree people (Cree as a second language) using the Cree worldview expounded in this dissertation as the foundation for these methods.

In order to address all the intergenerational impacts of colonialism, a second recommendation is a participatory action research study on total community healing processes which identifies the community strengths and its resilient factors as the springboard to action.

Currently, First Nations educational institutions use Euro-Canadian organizational systems. Finally, this study recommends research on traditional Cree educational processes in order to design an education organizational system that reflects the Cree First Nations worldview.

Limitations

As previously mentioned in Chapter Three, this study has several limitations. In addition to this list, it can be perceived that because only seven participants (four men and three women) were interviewed, this sample could be limiting. However, these participants were chosen for their specific knowledge; not only is this researcher

related by kinship ties but through lifelong community membership to each of these participants, and also at a deeper level through ceremonial and cultural activities. This relationship has enabled the researcher to choose from out of the entire community the seven participants best suited to this study. If there is a limitation it is in my unique placement within the community, as a 55-year-old (which provided me the capacity to bridge between the oldest and youngest participants), who went through residential school, is fluent in the Cree language, and an active participant in ceremonial activities, would pose a limitation to anyone else attempting this study.

Recommendations for Action

The seven laws given by the Creator that Mike spoke of are love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, wisdom, and truth. These laws are the foundation for community and organizational development based upon the Cree First Nations worldview. Traditionally, the elders exerted profound political, social, and moral influence in their communities. In a society with an oral tradition, elders performed an essential and highly valued function of transmitting tribal customs, language, and traditions to the younger generations. Frequently, they also played a special role in identifying tribal members who displayed the qualities of leadership. Restoring the elders role in our communities is the first recommendation.

The resurgence of First Nations languages and cultures must be a priority in all communities because the loss of a language means the loss of the spirit. One cannot separate the language and spirituality; they are interconnected. In order for First Nations communities to develop educational projects aimed at linguistic and cultural

survival, we must first have dialogue and consensus within our communities, voices that colonialism has attempted to suppress. A process has started and is evolving; it is informally driven by relationships as part of the natural family systems. While Blue Quills First Nations College has been and continues to be a focal point for that kind of energy, programs cannot be forced on the community. However, Blue Quills First Nations College can take a nurturing role in facilitating movements born within the communities and operating from within the family systems.

What must occur is education for liberation, not education for indoctrination. It is vital for our First Nations to change the present educational systems to reflect our values and beliefs in order to facilitate the decolonizing process. With the guidance of traditional knowledge, Blue Quills First Nations College is developing curriculum and training workshops for First Nations leaders. Although leadership is targeted as the first focal group of the liberated educational experience, eventually the entire colonial system is destined for redesign.

Our First Nations leaders must be strong and have full support of our people in order to liberate ourselves from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the Indian Act policies and proceed with community development agenda: to serve, to empower their people, and to restore balance so that community members understand their roles and responsibilities. Community development begins with human development; therefore, total community healing must occur to address the colonial impacts, beginning with the individual, then the family, and eventually the whole community. Blue Quills First

Nations College and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation are working in collaboration to provide the environment for healing.

Finally, First Nations leaders must invite the Canadian federal government to honor the Treaties and First Nations inherent rights. Cross-cultural training would facilitate building a better understanding between mainstream society and First Nations communities. Blue Quills First Nations College has begun the process of developing and presenting cross cultural training to mainstream institutions.

While these recommendations cite Blue Quills First Nations College, these can be implemented in any community. Blue Quills First Nations College is communally owned and operated by seven First Nations communities and is situated on a First Nations reserve.

We must honor the Creator's gift of our cultures as vital and valid in the twenty-first century. As the Hau de no sau nee (Akwasasne Notes, 1978) have declared:

The traditional Native peoples hold the key to the reversal of the processes in Western Civilization which hold the promise of unimaginable future suffering and destruction. Spiritualism is the highest form of political consciousness.

And we, the native peoples of the Western Hemisphere, are among the world's surviving proprietors of that kind of consciousness. We are here to impart that message. (p. 11)

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

First Interview:

1. What can First nations leaders do to reshape their own self-governance systems based on their values, beliefs of collectivity, consensus decision making, cooperation, kinship, sharing and community, as a basis for community development?
2. What are the Cree First Nations Values and beliefs?
3. How have these values and beliefs been retained?
4. How else might they be retained?
5. How can Canadian First Nations reshape Canadian federal policy?

Second Interview:

1. What role did the treaty signers have in the Treaty making process?
2. What roles did other people have in this process?
3. Who or what were they responsible to?
4. What were the processes of the Treaty making within each First Nation?
5. How were people identified to be a signatory for the Treaties, i.e., Pakan?
6. What do the leadership of today need to learn from this?

Group Interview:

1. What are the values, beliefs, customs, and traditions that have been detrimentally affected by European systems?
2. What qualities/skills of contemporary leadership are required to assist First Nations community members to get beyond the colonial effects (welfare) and make effective changes in the community?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of leaders in the retention of matters of spirituality, identity, language and relationship to the land? Why?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

University of San Diego**CONSENT TO ACT AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT**

Leona Makokis is conducting a research study on the Legitimization and Identity in First Nations Renewal.

As a participant to be interviewed, I understand:

- 1. I will be interviewed individually extensively concerning this topic.**
- 2. I will be interviewed more than once.**
- 3. I will be audio-taped, along with seven other participants as part of the research study. A consensus decision making model will be utilized whereby I will fully participate in the discussions at this videotaped session.**
- 4. I will provide my name to be published as a part of this study.**
- 5. I understand that the data collection may take approximately 9 hours of time over a period of about 7 months.**
- 6. My participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I am not a minor.**
- 7. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without jeopardy to myself.**

Leona Makokis has explained this study to me and answered my questions. If I have other questions or research-related problems, I can reach Leona Makokis at 403-645-4455 during office hours.

If I have any questions concerning the standing of Leona Makokis at the University of San Diego, I will contact her dissertation chair Mary Jo Abascal Hildebrand at 415-422-5505.

There are no agreements, written or verbal, related to this study beyond that expressed on this consent form. I have received a copy of this consent document and "The Experimental Subject's Bill of Rights."

I, the undersigned, understand the above explanations and, on that basis, I give my consent to my voluntary participation in this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Location

Date

Signature of Witness

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date