### Historia oral indígena

*Indigenous Oral History*

**CHAIR**

*Sue Andersen*

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Healing narratives: negotiating wellness discourses in the Cree Nation of Chisasibi

Ioana Radu
(Canada):

Resumen: Las historias que la gente cuenta sobre sí mismos revelan la complejidad de las interacciones sociales. Es decir, la “tensión entre las formas ideológicas oficiales y aquellas de auto-representación enfocadas localmente y culturalmente construidas” (James, 2000: 222). En contextos indígenas, las historias de vida y la narración de cuentos re-contextualizan la historia indígena contemporánea y reclaman autoridad y control sobre la producción y la movilización de conocimientos dentro y fuera de las comunidades.

Este trabajo presenta los resultados de una exploración etnográfica de un programa de curación en los territorios indígenas desarrollado por la Nación Cree de Chisasibi, así como entrevistas con jóvenes y curanderos tradicionales con respecto al enfoque de la salud y del bienestar. La curación es un concepto que es a la vez diverso y múltiple que refleja las concepciones particulares de la identidad, el lugar, la cultura, el empoderamiento y la responsabilidad. Nos centramos en la manera en que los relatos de curación fueron co-creados y movilizados con el fin de lograr resultados positivos y beneficiosos para los miembros de la comunidad. A la vez estos funcionan como un espacio de reflexión en el que las incertidumbres, los conflictos, los temores y los compromisos se renegocian constantemente.

Abstract: The stories that people tell about themselves reveal the complexity of social interactions, the “tension between official ideological forms and locally focused, culturally constructed forms of self-representation” (James, 2000: 222). In Aboriginal contexts, life stories and storytelling (re)contextualize contemporary Aboriginal history and reclaim authority and control over knowledge production and mobilization within and beyond communities.

This paper presents results from an ethnographic exploration of a land-based healing program developed by the Cree Nation of Chisasibi, as well as interviews with youth and traditional healers regarding Cree approaches to health and wellness. Healing is a concept that is both diverse and multiple reflecting particular conceptions of identity, place, culture, empowerment and responsibility. We focus on the way in which healing narratives were co-created and mobilized in order to achieve positive outcomes and benefits for community members at large, while also functioning as a space of reflection in which uncertainties, conflicts, apprehensions, and compromises are continually renegotiated in Indigenous communities.
KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

As the science and art of the Other, knowledge production in the social sciences gained authority from the institutionalization and professionalization of ethnographic research “both scientifically validated and based on a unique personal experience” (Clifford, 1983:121). In anthropology, the “men on the spot” (missionary, trader, or traveller) were replaced by a new generation of academically trained ethnographer-anthropologists that had developed the ‘best scientific hypotheses’ and mastered a refined level of neutrality, starting with the seminal work of Malinowski in Trobriand Islands (Clifford, 1983; Geertz, 2000; Smith, 1999). Moreover, as positivist epistemology spread by way of anthropologists and later sociologists to all corners of the world, social science took upon the task of not only understanding the ‘dynamics of collective life’ but also to alter them towards a desired direction (Burawoy, 2009; Geertz, 2000). Coinciding with the colonial expansion and influenced by the social-contract theory of Hobbes and Locke, social science research until the latter half of the 20th century had a devastating impact on the cultures and people with which it engaged, and especially Aboriginal peoples.

Early anthropological research followed the ideals of Enlightenment as modernity and was used to colonize indigenous knowledge by claiming ‘positional superiority’. Such has been the impact of early colonial anthropological research that Smith (1999) argues that:

[...] the ethnographic gaze of anthropology has collected, classified, and represented other cultures to the extent that anthropologists are often the academics popularly perceived by the indigenous world as the epitome of all that is bad with academics (67).

Serving the needs of the empire, totalizing discourses produced by empirical ‘facts’ shaped the relations between colonizing powers and Aboriginal people and denied the latter’s forms of knowledge and world views by depoliticizing the research endeavor through its insistence on objectivity and neutrality (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

The reflexive and interpretative turn in the social sciences become evident in the late 1950s and 1960s and coincided with the breakup of the colonial regimes throughout the world. It led to a realignment of the relationship between the researcher and the researched and questioned colonial interpretations of the ‘other’. Indeed, the intersubjective character of research led social scientists, and especially those engaged in ethnographic research, not only to reassess their posture towards their research partners but to acknowledge and value the political and social purpose of the research process itself:

[...] neither the experience nor the interpretative activity of the scientific researcher can be considered innocent. It becomes necessary to consider ethnography, not as the experience and interpretation of a circumscribed “other” reality, but rather as a constructive negotiation involving at least, and usually more, conscious, politically significant subjects[...] the language of ethnography is shot through with other subjectivities and specific contextual overtones[...] the multiplication of possible readings reflects the fact that self-conscious “ethnographic” consciousness can no longer be seen as the monopoly of certain Western cultures or social classes” (Clifford, 1983: 133 and 141).

In sum, critical theory uncovered the multiple knowledges participants possess, including both explicit and tacit knowledge, which are locally and temporally bound, reflecting the changing position of different actors within a social situation. Moreover, social scientists are “inherently part of the world they study” and carry theories and tacit knowledge that allows them to ‘see the world in a specific way’ (Burawoy, 2009: xiii). With subjectivity back in the researcher’s epistemological tool box, social sciences focused on meaning and signification – “understanding how we understand understandings not our own” or seeing from the ‘native’s point of view’ (Geertz, 2000:4). Lutz and Neis (2008) argue that acknowledging other ways of knowing is not enough, knowledge creation and co-creation has to mobilize beyond the ‘community’ from which it originates. The authors stress that knowledge production and movement needs to be linked to power relations and take place within a view for cross-cultural interaction especially since state intervention and planning has largely failed to respond to the needs of local communities and often has detrimental effects on the regional scale.
The new chapter in social science research that rejected colonial theories aimed to understand the life of Aboriginal people from the internal perceptions and representations of the Aboriginal actors themselves. These researchers tried to correct the damage inflicted by their predecessors — the ‘huge devastation and painful struggle’ — but also to better understand the ‘persistent survival’ and agency of Aboriginal individuals and nations. In short, the reconfiguration of social sciences aided postcolonial peoples’ struggle to reclaim authority and control over their lives and histories. It has enabled these communities to find their ‘voice’, to denounce the colonial practice of ‘silencing subjects’ and dispel constructed illusions of ‘speaking subjects’ (Levesque 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). The opening of academia to Aboriginal peoples and knowledge was accompanied by an intersecting movement from Aboriginal communities towards research institutions and a broader engagement with policy decision-making relating to their people and lands. They have challenged the research community to shatter the walls separating the disciplines and build a transdisciplinary research project that aims to disseminate the knowledge widely and make way for “diverse and collective forms of teaching and learning”:

*But the specificity of this research field also derives from something more fundamental. No longer seen as distant and exterior focus of study, Aboriginal people have gradually emerged as knowledgeable and aware subjects (Lévesque, 2009: 95).*

Even if their place in the academy is still problematic, Aboriginal peoples have now begun to ‘center their concerns and worldview in a way to know and understand theory and research from their own perspectives and for their own purposes’ (Smith, 1999: 29). Whether it is defined as a Ceremony, a Circular way of thinking or Kappua Maori, Indigenist research shares an epistemology based on relationality in which “relationships do not merely shape reality, but they are reality” [Wilson, 2008: 7]. In other words, reality is a process of relationships. This implies a methodology of accountability to these relationships: respect, reciprocity and responsibility. Taken together Indigenist and the newly restructured (albeit at various degrees of internalization) Western social science research have now come to a point of intersection in the way research is thought about and applied, and more importantly, in the way they conceptualize knowledge and the role it plays in society.

**ORAL HISTORY AND LIFE-STORY INTERVIEWING**

Emerging as political actors in the quest for taking their own self-defined place in society, Aboriginal people call into question the procedures in which representation is based and express the right to speak, to be heard and to take part in the definition of the common world. It is what Callon et al. (2008) call the ‘democratization of democracy’, an emphasis for “procedures more open to debate, more welcoming towards emergent groups, and more attentive to the organization of the expression of their views and the discussion it calls for” (118). Within this complex network of institutions, technologies, people and ideas, research is a power intervention. It needs to recognize the power dynamics of the relationships between the researcher and participants in a way that builds strategies for a more culturally and politically sensitive approaches. In this postcolonial context, oral history and life-story interviews are relevant to an exploration of the relational, practical and emergent aspects of Aboriginal autonomy and healing because they engage with the interplay between individual and collective memory. Oral history uncovers the relationships between life and context, self and place, and the way individuals make meaning of their experience in light of contemporary community complexities and historical contexts in which their settings are embedded (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Cruikshank, 1999; Portelli, 1990 & 1997).

Specifically, life stories bring the human and the subjective into the historical context. It is about finding meaning in the context of a life [High, 2009a]. To speak of any historical event is to speak of the multiplicity of experiences lived and relived in daily life. In other words, oral history is an intersubjective engagement between the past and the present, between the narrator and the historian, and between memory and identity. As such, oral narratives tell less about ‘what really happened’ and more about how an event has shaped and changed an individual’s life, state of being, material conditions, values and ideology, and his/her social relations. Because oral history is centered on the individual and his/her place in history, it is also about knowledge and authority in terms of ‘who owns the past’ and ‘whose knowledge counts’. Life-
story interviewing therefore encourages participants to frame their life according to what is important to them (as opposed to what official discourses emphasize) as well as through control over what is being shared: participants combine narrative modes that link the institutional, communal and personal referents in patterns that are meaningful for the teller (Cole & Knowles, 2001; Cruikshank, 1999; High, 2009a; Portelli, 1990 & 1997).

The dialogic space that the interview creates empowers individuals and social groups not only to challenge established discourses and ideologies, but also to imagine a different future that is in line with their life projects. Indeed, unexplored or silenced stories and experiences bring about a better understanding of history and allow individuals and groups to pass on knowledge to the younger generations and ideally establish an effective cross-cultural dialogue from which a more equitable future can be built (Portelli, 1997; Cruikshank, 2005). The past, therefore, is not only mobilized in the present but also serves as reflection for the future. Studies among First Nations in Canada also underline the tactically positioned oral evidence of the past in the context of contemporary political and social struggles. More importantly, by sharing their lives and traditions, the aim of the Aboriginal people in Canada has been to create a dialogic space in which multicultural and multigenerational perspectives can coexist in a non-hierarchical way – to construct an inclusive and diverse identity (Archibald, 2009; Cruikshank, 2005; Mills, 2005). In sum, oral history research should “enable people to sit together and talk meaningfully about how their indigenous knowledge could be effectively used for education and for living a good life and to think about possibilities for overcoming problems experienced in their communities” (Archibald, 2009: 81).

PARTICIPATORY MEDIA, STORYTELLING AND SHARING AUTHORITY

The digital revolution of the 21st century holds important democratizing potential for knowledge mobilization as it opens new spaces of expression and strengthens the wide dissemination of ‘histories from below’. Nevertheless, it can marginalize as much as include and as High (2009b) cautions we have to be careful of the “missionary zeal” of the infinite possibilities ‘inherent’ in digital technologies. Indeed, the important aspect of any technology is the epistemological and ontological choices that inform its use and the way the message is mediated during the inevitable ‘translation’ that takes place in the creation of audio, video or photographic content (Coudry, 2009; High, 2009b; Frisch, 2006).

While ‘new media’ can include online social networks, hypertext fiction or immersive video games, discussion therein will specifically focus on participatory media as documentary video production, given both the community expressed preference for this medium as well as my personal interest in it. Archibald’s (2008) work with the Coast Salish elders in British Columbia stressed the difficulty of translating Aboriginal oral narratives into text, including the different styles of expression and knowledge transmission. She argues that video and audio content can mediate the rigidity of the text and allow oral narratives to find a ‘voice’. Likewise, oral historians argue that much meaning can be lost in the move from the audio to the text of the transcript, and through a second translation from the transcript to the final publication. Facial expressions, tone of voice, physical demeanor, gestures as well as silences provide a rich context for interpreting stories and transmitting the emotional experience of the memory, a context that is difficult to translate into text and most often disappears with it (High, 2009; Portelli, 1999).

The explicit objective of producing a video also helps communities and individuals to reflect on what image of themselves they want to construct as well as how others will come to know them. Whether the product is directed internally towards the community members or externally for the broad public a conscious choice is made through active participation, construction and control over the narrative (Coudry, 2008; Evans et al., 2009; Luchs & Miller, 2011). Participatory video can range from interactive DVDs, to short or feature documentaries, and digital storytelling. Authority over the content is also more easily shared for a video production than for a typical academic text by active collaboration in the final editing and contribution of media (eg. photographs, audio content). Depending on the format, sharing authority over the concept, production and distribution varies from transfer of technical skills and deliberate construction of the narrative by the participants, to framing the main topic or identifying a targeted audience while leaving the technical aspects in the control of the research team (Evans et al., 2009; High,
2009; Luchs & Miller, 2011). Nevertheless, participatory video need not be specifically concerned with transferring technical videography skills as other aspects such as intergenerational bonding, opening up dialog between community members, or empowering individuals through sharing of meaningful experiences, are just as important for the community (Evans et al., 2009; High, 2009; Luchs & Miller, 2011).

In sum, through participatory video based on an approach of sharing authority, communities and individuals can frame narratives in a way that reinforces a sense of belonging, deliver a social message that empowers others to express and find a place in community, and call on institutions to strengthen policy and service provision. Nevertheless, one has to always be aware that video products also capture a specific point in time in an individual’s life while their personal stories continue to develop. Revisiting the past also brings out difficult memories that can affect individuals. Researchers need to be aware that their work is not meant as a therapeutic intervention but as an exploration in self-expression, therefore the needs of the participants should guide the research process (Luchs & Miller, 2011).

NEGOTIATING WELLNESS DISCOURSES IN THE CREE NATION OF CHISASIBI

For the Cree Nation of eastern James Bay (Quebec, Canada) exercising jurisdiction over the social welfare and health of its members is an expression of decolonization and empowerment. It responds to the vision of a Cree society where “individuals are well balanced emotionally, spiritually, mentally and physically”, where “families live in harmony and contribute to healthy communities” and where “communities are supportive, responsible and accountable” (CBHSSJB, 2004, p. 8). To incorporate Cree values and practices in service provision means moving beyond the Western medical model to grounding programming on Cree healing and care-giving practices. Myriad culturally safe and relevant wellness local activities are taking place throughout the year, from winter snowshoe journeys, to elders and youth conferences, music festivals, powwows and Sundances. Unfortunately, these innovative and fluid practices are seldom found in academic literature, which tends to focus on formal structures that govern education, entry into the labour market, health and social service provision or civic engagement. Less so are explorations of the relationships that local community members maintain and strengthen with the land and cultural practices, albeit in various indirect and unconventional ways.

The research presented here aims to uncover personal as well as communal Cree approaches to healing and wellbeing through life-story interviews framed within the approach of reflexive ethnography. (Burawoy, 2009). In other words, the method and methodology recognize that: 1) the interview is an intervention, a space in which co-creation takes place through a intersubjective dialog; 2) the ‘situational knowledge’ of the participants should be unpacked through multiple methodologies (in this case participant observation, individual life-story interviews, and a video ethnography) since knowledge is both explicit and tacit; 3) the everyday world is simultaneously shaped by and is shaping broader processes and forces [power relations] both local and extralocal; and 4) fieldwork is a continuous interaction between researcher and participants each with specific positionality (biography, race, skills, knowledge, etc.), thus continuous reflection of the interaction and the knowledge is produced is necessary for reconstructing theory. For the purposes of this paper I will focus on the life-story interviews and what they reveal in terms of history and power relations within the context of healing and wellbeing in Chisasibi.

HEALING NARRATIVES

Conception of identity, cultural change and empowerment as well as possible link with collective autonomy, life-story interviews were conducted with individuals that have progressed in their healing journey to a point where they are now actively involved in the collective healing process in Chisasibi (and elsewhere). It attempts to bring to the fore the voices of Cree individuals to explore, through their life story, what healing means to them and how (or if) it relates to the broader autonomy process in the community. Thus, the narrative analysis presents a more grounded and contextualized contemporary Cree history as experienced by the participants in this project.

Preliminary life-story interviews were conducted in 2009, and have provided a good indication that digital storytelling yields very rich and highly contextualized historical accounts. A thirteen minute digital story was presented in 2010 at the Oral History Association of Australia conference, which received positive feedback (Radu, 2012). In addition, the video was positively reviewed by the interviewee, who shared it with
other community members. This confirms in part that life-story interviewing and the production of a digital story are well received by a variety of audiences.

The style of the interviews was informal and guided by a questionnaire whose structure was flexible and functioned as a general guideline for the interview. In effect, I hardly used the questionnaire since I wanted to let each interviewee address the issues and topics that were important to them. Not only they answered my unasked questions but brought much more richness to the conversation and content than I would have been able to anticipate in advance. Each interview lasted from 1 to 2.5 hours. I conducted 8 interviews with an equal gender representation. Depending on the participant’s needs and aims, their interviews were either audio recorded [2] or video recorded [6]. In April 2013, I conducted a video ethnography of a land-based healing program. As part of the healing activities in Chisasibi [and in other Cree communities] groups of 5 to 7 youth take part in land-based programs aimed at helping them overcome difficult situations. Generally the group is guided by a respected community elder (or couple) who is sometimes accompanied by a traditional counselor. The group spends on average two to four weeks at the elder’s camp, immersed in bush life. Sharing of personal experiences and teachings are part of the daily healing process. A 35min documentary that follows a group of youth was produced in collaboration with the community to raise awareness of the project at the community level and also within the Cree health and social service providers. It therefore had a dual objective of making a positive impact on individuals who may require support as well as institutionally in terms of implementing culturally safe intervention methods.

COLONIALISM AND WELLBEING IN CHISASIBI

And my mom, she used to yell at me for no reason when I was young. She always said something about my dad. She always put my dad down in front of me. They weren’t together or anything…telling me he was a bum, that he doesn’t do anything. I kept wondering, when I was about 16, I wondered why she kept saying that stuff about my dad to me? I didn’t even know him. The stuff she used to say to me too. Like my parents always used to put me down. I started thinking why were they like that? Why were they like that towards me? I kept wondering. I was thinking about what my grandfather used to say. He used to say stuff about when he was in residential school. He used to say, they went through a lot when they were in the residential school. And he used to hit me a lot when we were in the bush, when I didn’t do things right. He used to slap me in my face and stuff. I kept wondering if it was not from the residential school. Why my grandfather treats me like that, my mother, my grandmother. I started figuring out stuff. It helped me a lot, the way I thought about stuff. The way I approached my mother. The way I approached my grandfather. I started talking back to them when I was old enough, like 16 or 17. I kept telling them ‘it’s the past, you guys should not put this stuff on us, what you guys went through. It was a long time ago.’ And they couldn’t…most of the time my grandfather did not have a reply to that (Young man, Chisasibi, interviewed October 2013).

The residential school system has had the most lasting and significant impact on the wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples. A failed attempt at social engineering, it is regarded as Canada’s shameful genocide that continues to reverberate within generations of survivors and their families. The physical, sexual and psychological abuse suffered by former students is only recently being acknowledged and redressed through the establishment, in 2008, of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC). Although institutionally, the Commission and the reconciliation work that it has initiated is expected to “guide and inspire Aboriginal peoples and Canadians in a process of[...]renewed relationships that are based on mutual understanding and respect”, the everyday lives of thousands of survivors and their families continue to be affected by the trauma and suffering perpetuated in the schools (TRC, 2012). All the interviewees involved in this project have identified the residential schools as a source of marginalization, domination and violence that continues to affect present generations. The young man quoted above is a 3rd generation survivor, that although has not set foot in a residential school, he is facing and has experienced
similar abuse from community members and extended family. Indeed, as a social worker charged with coordinating the TRC events in the Cree Nation explains:

They were told ‘you got to do it now or else you can’t do it ‘cause there is a deadline’ and some people were not ready, some people were shocked, and some people were going through nightmares...some people said they can’t sleep when they talk about the residential schools. Their issues were coming back and we had to make sure there was support for these people. And there are a lot of them. I think in Chisasibi there’s about 600. Just for Chisasibi. It’s hard. But see, now I understand why the people are the way they are, where all that is coming from. And it’s passed down from generation to generation because it is not dealt with, it’s not talked about. The way I see it, for me, for my wellbeing, I had to let it out and talk about it. Let it out in the open and talk about the truth. That’s what helped me to stay away from alcohol or feel better about myself. It’s been 27 years now that I didn’t drink. I have come a long way. Thats it. People need to let out and talk about it, but there is a lot of shame, and guilt. But you can’t blame anybody cause it comes from way back, it’s been passing down to generation to generation to generation... (Social Worker, interviewed October 2013).

In exploring personal healing journeys, it is this ‘talking about’ personal and communal issues that becomes a first step towards addressing the suffering in one’s life. Acknowledging the pain and trying to identify its source helps individuals to recognize both historical injustices as well as their contemporary structural manifestations. Guilt, shame, and fear are thus better understood. Sharing or talking with others builds a community of solidarity from which individuals can draw strength and inspiration to continue their healing journey:

I really want to see more and more people overcome their difficulties to finally let go. It’s such a simple term, but is such a complex and abstract notion, of ‘letting go’. And I felt the benefits of just letting go, and it was wonderful, and I felt 100 times lighter. It’s really hard to teach that to somebody. It is a big process to go through. But once you learn how to let go, and you feel lighter, you want to do it again and again. And you get better and better, and you start letting go of more and more. And I would love to see more people being able to do that, to be happy. You know, I had my troubles and my anger towards my family and my parents, but at one point I let go. And I understood that they did the best they could with what they have. And they did pretty good by me because I turned out well. So I love them. And that’s it that’s all. I am not going to point the finger at them anymore, because I need to own up and take responsibility of my own feelings and my own actions (Denise P., interviewed October 2013).

Healing therefore becomes a means by which individuals are empowered by learning the structural and underlying causes of individual and communal suffering. By gaining a new awareness of the power structures, both internal and external, and how these impact community life, they are inspired to take responsibility of their own wellbeing but also of that of the community:

For me, you need to work on yourself. You need to deal with your issues to help others. ‘Cause when I stared to help myself I wanted people to feel what I felt. It was like...how do I say it...it is something good, and you need to do this. I wanted other people to have that. So I went into counselling. I thought I could help people, save the world. Like my people. But I saw that for myself I had to deal with myself before I can help people. So, I worked as a NAADAP worker and I worked at the women’s shelter, even the group home (Social Worker, interviewed October 2013).

Not everyone is skilled or wants to enter the mental wellness field as a professional. Contributing to personal and communal wellbeing is done though a multitude of ways, some more obvious, others less so:
I have been slowly integrating myself in little projects in the community to help improve our environment here. Because I believe that...I am tired of hearing parents complain that the lack of services and resources in terms of health and education and I figure why leave our community? Why aren’t we here working and taking part and improve these things? I started with, just a small Facebook page called ‘the Pac’s page’ for communication between school and parents, because I felt it was really lacking. I was working in the school. So that was my first step towards doing my little part. I think is baby steps. You know if everybody did a little bit here and there, we can help improve our community so much more (Denise P., interviewed October 2013).

For others, land-based cultural practices have a positive impact not only on individual mental health but they are part and parcel of contemporary decolonization processes in Indigenous communities. Recuperating and renegotiating cultural healing and wellness models strengthen intergenerational knowledge mobilization, ensure cultural continuity and create socio-culturally relevant institutions:

Most of the stuff that we are trying to do is to bring back programs, more traditional programs and a lot of the stuff that I have been doing is research. I have been gathering a lot of stuff on land-based healing and most of the literature I have seen, point to the fact that they are working and this is something that has to be continued because, so far, what we have been doing, what the government has been doing hasn’t been working. Of course you have to realize it’s not working because we were not raised in that society and our traditions go back to the land. I think that is something that has to be acknowledged and something that has to continue, not just by the Cree Health Board, to continue and acknowledge, but also by the government. They have to acknowledge that this is something that the Aboriginal people need (Mary-Louise, mental health nurse, interviewed October 2013).

ORAL HISTORY AND DECOLONIZATION IN INDIGENOUS CONTEXTS

Although the scope of this paper has not allowed expanding on the process of collaboration with the community, the overall research that frames this discussion is first and foremost aimed at facilitating community reflection around issues of wellbeing. As such, it strives to contribute to local empowerment, understood as the creation of safe and trustworthy spaces of deliberation from which individuals can be inspired to take action. The collaboration with the community began six years ago and has framed my research from the onset. Strengthening my relationship with the community, particularly the Miyupimatisiun (Wellness) Committee, has been the most valuable aspect of this experience. In the many hours of community dialogue and informal discussions with the members of the Committee specific gaps in knowledge and research needs have been identified that I hope to bridge (at least in part) through my research. A genuine co-creation and mobilization is now attainable that was not possible six years ago. Indeed, community research partnerships can only be built in time and through an open and reflexive dialogue around the kitchen table, in community halls, and during long-distance travels.

By insisting on subjectivity, relationality, self-reflexivity and sharing authority, oral history has enabled me to build a decolonizing research agenda that allows me “to recognize the interests of the tellers, and the dreams and desires beneath them” (Portelli, 1991: 2). Collaboration in knowledge production, interpretation and dissemination implies that “actors can affect the boundaries and indeed the conceptualization of the possible” and therefore continued, open and flexible dialog within the process of knowledge co-creation is key to ‘living a good life’, ‘think about possibilities for overcoming problems in our communities’ and ‘bring together people that are potentially at odds’ (Archibald, 2008; Cruikshank, 1999; Gaventa & Cornwall, 2001: 72).

Irrespective of the degree to which Indigenous nations have clarified or secured their rights, they have continued the challenging process of devising and strengthening effective governance regimes. Within this process, internal reflection and co-creation of a collective vision of development and well-being in their
communities is imperative. Indigenist and oral history epistemologies have therefore the potential of creating inspiring and inclusive spaces from which conversations about 'living a good life' can be sustained.
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La memoria oral en Yucatán (Mexico) para reproducir la diferencia cultural y la desigualdad social de la población de origen Maya.

Maya Lorena Pérez Ruiz
(Mexico):

Resumen: En Yucatán, México, se conserva la memoria histórica de lo que fue la organización social en el tiempo de la Colonia Española, misma que organizó a la población en República de Indios y República de Españoles: a los primeros se les denominó indios macehuales y a los segundos españoles, y si estos vivían en pueblos de indios de les llamó vecinos. Hasta hoy en pueblos como Yaxcabá, se mantiene la diferencia entre indios macehuales y vecinos, quienes se identifican a través de los apellidos, que se emplean para regular ciertos aspectos de la vida social como el matrimonio y la posición social. En este trabajo se explora cómo los habitantes de esta región de Yucatán, a pesar de haber construido una historia y una cultura regional particular, a través del imaginario colectivo mantienen las diferencias entre indios macehuales y vecinos españoles, argumentando que entre ellos existen diferencias culturales e identitarias sustentadas en su origen o indio o español. Se busca demostrar cómo la construcción de tal diferencia identitaria y cultural persiste como la base que sustenta desigualdad social, la dominación y el racismo que se ejerce contra la población de origen maya.
Power and Democracy in the History of Indigenous Higher Education in Australia: The Aboriginal Task Force.

Sue Anderson
(Australia):

Abstract: In 1973 the Aboriginal Task Force was formed in the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT) to provide Indigenous South Australian welfare workers with qualifications commensurate with the duties they were already performing in the workforce. It was so successful that the program quickly expanded into an Aboriginal-focussed nation-wide tertiary education facility that was the forerunner of all Australian university Indigenous-dedicated programs.

The establishment of the Aboriginal Task Force was grounded in a number of political and democratic principles and a radically changed political climate in Australia. Indigenous Australians, inspired by the Civil Rights and Black Power movements in the United States, had already staged their own Freedom Rides in the mid-1960s and it was from this political milieu that the Aboriginal Task Force emerged. The oral histories of early students of the program attest to their drive for the democratic right to higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to the power it afforded them. The vast majority of these students forged long and distinguished careers and have made outstanding contributions in the field of Aboriginal affairs. This paper will examine the history of the Aboriginal Task Force in the context of these issues.