

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ORAL AND WRITTEN MODE
OF COMMUNICATION WITHIN THE FABRIC OF WESTERN BASED
SOCIETY

By

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Integrated Studies Project

Submitted to DR. LESLIE JOHNSON

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta

AUGUST, 2006

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Opening Prayer

There is a Longing

There is a longing among all people and
creatures to have a sense of purpose and worth.
To satisfy that common longing in all of us we
Must respect each other
In the olden times man
and creatures walked as friends
who carried the beauty of the
land in their hearts. Now each
one of us needed to make
sure the salmon can find a
place to spawn and the bear
cub a tree to climb.
There is little time left
And much effort needed!

- Chief Dan George

Acknowledgement

I dedicate this paper to my parents. They were the greatest teachers in my life. When they left the physical world I suddenly felt a profound sense of loss for my primary source of value based teachings. I realize now that it was their orally based understandings of the sacredness of life that continues to aid my journey through life. Their process of education through the sharing of their life experiences will always remain at the forefront of my mind and I will continue to acknowledge the significance of their teachings for the rest of my life.

Reflections of a Northern Aboriginal Researcher

In order to establish some degree of authenticity to the subject matter I feel it is important to begin with a brief introduction of my cultural and linguistic background. I identify myself primarily by my Swampy Cree and Scottish ancestry. I was raised in the small northern community of Grand Rapids, Manitoba. However, my genealogical roots are located in the community of Norway House. My parents, now deceased, relocated to Grand Rapids one year before I was born.

I have come to appreciate the diversity of my own northern aboriginal heritage as a result of conducting extensive genealogical research into family origins. My paternal Scottish Grandfather immigrated to Canada in the mid 1880's from the Isle of Lewis in northern Scotland taking up employment with the Hudson's Bay Company. He eventually married a Cree widow by the name of Sally Neepin, a daughter of a Cree hunter and trapper from the Trout Lake region in northern Ontario. My maternal great grandfather, Reverend Edward Paupanekis was the first aboriginal person to be ordained into the Methodist Mission in Norway House. Archival sources indicate that Edward Paupanekis was the son of William Paupanekis, a Muskego or Swampy Cree from the York Factory region. Unfortunately, the process of colonization has impacted my life and Cree was not my first language. I am a listener to the Swampy Cree dialect which really puts me at a disadvantage in terms of the linguistic profundity of my indigenous worldview. However, as with my six older siblings I did grow up with the stories of "long ago". As a result, I have developed a solid understanding and appreciation of what life was like "long ago" when we as a family relied on the land much more than we do today. My family's orally based ecologically based teachings through the sharing of their land based experiences has greatly influenced how I have come to view the world around me as a northern aboriginal woman. For this I am truly grateful.

The Dichotomy between the Oral and Written Mode of Communication

How cultures produce and interpret their knowledge is a fascinating area of investigation, especially as it pertains to the proliferation of northern indigenous oral traditions within the fabric of western based society. The purpose of this inquiry is to examine the literature in order to provide a critique of the nature of the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication within the contemporary world. This paper explores a range of theoretical perspectives of how indigenous and non-indigenous cultures produce and transmit their knowledge, particularly as it pertains to the ongoing transmission of northern indigenous oral traditions and how the oral mode of thought ultimately determine how northern aboriginal people continue to respond within the mainstream society.

The philosophical debates regarding the importance and relevance of the oral vs. written mode of communication in our rapidly changing society appear to be immeasurable. Many notable essays have been published since the 1960's concerning the oral vs. written cultures. Such major studies are instrumental in aiding the cultural debate regarding the importance of orality vs. literacy. This particular topic continues to remain relatively controversial in the modern world, especially as it pertains to the decline of literacy (Graff, 1987). Many theorists involved in comparative analysis refer to a binary divide or dichotomy between the primitive vs. civilized, traditional vs. modern, oral vs. visual, and so forth. Such theories lean toward the suggestion that there are radical differences between modes of thought between the oral and literate societies. Yet, other theorists suggest that there is no dichotomy whatsoever between the two. The thesis of this paper is that *northern indigenous oral narratives continue to be dominated by the written mode of communication which inadvertently serves as justification for the propagation of the dichotomy between the two*. In order to narrow the scope of the topic without taking away from the overall theoretical emphasis, this paper will address three main areas of concern that are fundamental, but not limited to, how northern oral narratives continue to be marginalized by the indoctrination of the written word. The three major areas of concern are the politicization of indigenous languages, the attrition of kinship and family ties, and the legitimacy of indigenous prophecy narratives. Other issues are pertinent such as the relationship with the land but for the purposes of this treatment it is best to keep focus on the three areas. Regardless of the present circumstances, the reality is that the interchange between the oral and written mode of communication does present critical challenges for the range of oral and written cultures that exist within the fabric of western based society. Any attempt to assess the "truth" of either the oral or written mode of communication is outside the scope of this paper, and that assessing what constitutes "truth" depends on accepting the standards of validating truth value within a given system of knowledge. (Watson & Goulet, 1992)

The Struggle for Authenticity

Prior to engaging in a discussion of the how the three major areas of concern propagate the marginalization of the oral voice from within the fabric of western based society, it is crucial to begin with a few comments that create a concrete analysis of the attributes of this relationship. The relationship between the oral and written interpretation takes into account power relations between cultures who rely on them. As a result, systemic issues emerge when the oral and written cultures interact in the struggle for authenticity. Clearly, the struggle for authenticity intensifies the dichotomy between the written and the oral, and unfortunately, it is the oral mode of communication that often ends up taking the back bench under such circumstances. Jack Goody's (2000) inquiry into the interaction of cultures with and without writing emphasizes that not only did literacy have an empowering impact on oral cultures, but the consequence of the process have been overwhelming. He states that;

I am interested in two aspects of the power of the written word. The first is the power it gives to cultures that process writing over purely oral ones, a power that enables the former to dominate the latter in many ways, the most important of which is the development and accumulation of knowledge about the world. (Goody, 2000, 1)

Other scholars articulate similar concerns when it comes to determining which particular modes of thought generate absolute truth. For instance, anthropologist Julie Cruikshank, for example, notes that;

Increasingly, consideration is given to similar processes that may govern both oral and written traditions. My own attempts to combine oral and written accounts from the Yukon Territory suggest that both kinds of narrative may have in common problems not always addressed in ethnohistory. A critical handling of the symbolic and mythical elements in written, as well as in oral, accounts may direct us back to the social process in which both are embedded, raising questions about the privileged status of documentary evidence as a reference point for establishing truth, falsehood, or factuality. (Cruikshank, 1992, p.21)

Given the nature of this discussion, it is easy to detect that the project of the integration of both the oral and written mode of communication within the fabric of western based society has not been without its particular set of trials and tribulations. The task is complex in nature. Scholars who recognize the complexity of knowledge integration offer some striking revelations. Paul Nadasdy, for example, declares that the project of knowledge integration in the northern parts of North America is nothing more than “an effort by government and First Nations to engage in the cooperative management, or co-management of wildlife and other resource.” (Nadasdy, 2003, p.115). Experience has proven that the litigious evolution of the concept co-management works, when favorable conditions warrant, between two parties who negotiate on equal footing. In northern regions central Canada, efforts to maximize the potential of the theory of co-management have yet to be actualized to any acceptable sense of measurable satisfaction. The impacts of the development of hydroelectric resources have left huge marks on northern indigenous oral societies. Clearly, there are lessons to be learned when the voices of oral societies are annulled for the sake of modernization, and who are now expected to yield to co-management arrangements. (Hoffman, 2002).

How then does one explicate the struggle for authenticity between the oral and written mode of communication within the fabric of western based society? Paul Nadasdy alerts us to the technical types of issues that surface in the project of integrating orally based knowledge with the written text. He says that:

...At conferences, workshops and other formal arenas for the discussion of traditional knowledge and co-management, as well as in the vast majority of the academic and policy-oriented literature on the topic, participants and authors are likely to identify and focus on certain obstacles to the integration of traditional knowledge and science. What they argue, arise from the fact that the two types of knowledge are incommensurable. In contrast to traditional knowledge, which is assumed to be qualitative, intuitive, holistic, and oral, science is seen as quantitative, analytical, reductionist, and written. Indeed, one cannot examine the question of traditional knowledge for long without being confronted by a barrage of

such dualistic comparisons (often arranged neatly in a table) purporting to sum up the differences between traditional knowledge and scientific knowledge. The assumption that since traditional knowledge is expressed in a form that is vastly different from and largely incompatible with, that of science, there are a whole host of essentially technical problems that accompany the efforts to integrate them. (Nasdasdy, 2003, p. 115)

The literary anthropologist, Claude Levi Strauss explained in profound detail the deterministic quality of the oral mode of communication, or magic, as he terms it. Strauss maximizes his philosophical argument by distinguishing the similarities and differences between orality and science which he later emphasizes as two parallel systems of knowledge. It might be noteworthy to mention the ongoing academic debate as to the similarities and differences between orally based knowledge, otherwise known as traditional knowledge, indigenous knowledge, or traditional indigenous knowledge and a whole range of other terms, and the written traditions which is often viewed as being embedded in western based science. He says that;

...the first difference between magic and science is therefore, that magic postulates a complete and all-embracing determinism. Science, on the other hand, is based on a distinction between levels; only some of these admit forms of determinism; on others the same forms of determinism are held not to apply. One can go further and think of the rigorous precision of magical thought and ritual practices as an expression of the truth of determinism, the mode in which scientific phenomena exist. In this view, the operations of determinism are divined and made use of in an all-embracing fashion before being known and properly applied, and magical rites and beliefs appear as so many expression of an act of faith in a science yet to be born. (Levi-Strauss, 1962 p.11)

Levi-Strauss' profound philosophical revelations strongly resonate with this paper's topic of discussion if an investigation of metaphysical debates regarding the nature of determinism were to be taken into consideration. Not to dispute the underpinnings of

Levi Strauss' assertions it is however, important to note that determinism has its own grounds for being in both oral and written societies. Within the fabric of western based society with its fixation on the written mode of communication about how the universe functions, determinism may hinder on the basis that, according to a particular set of foreseeable rules and regulations, the idea of free will may appear to be less than satisfactory.

Similarly, in northern indigenous oral societies, the presumption of determinism may appear to resonate along the same spectrum of thought whereby according to the intuitive nature of orality, life can be also become predetermined. Nowhere can this be more obvious than in the indigenous prophecy narratives that will be discussed later on in this paper. In this respect, the concept of free will ultimately falls prey to the notion of fatalism whereby human history has been ultimately preconceived. The indigenous ecologically based indigenous oral teachings of "everything happens for a reason" fit well into this particular framework of discussion.

As we leave this particular section of the discussion, the prototype of cultural determinism, whereby the culture that individuals are assigned to, whether it be oral or written, ultimately determine the social, economic and political circumstances is an important theoretical base in situating the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication in terms of the power that the written tradition has over orality. As is accepted by scholars such as Goody and Cruikshank, the domination of the written word over the oral mode may have far reaching impacts insofar as how the written mode of communication determines the social, economic and political circumstances of individuals within western based society.

The Politicization of Indigenous Oral Languages

The first area of concern that delineates the marginalization of indigenous oral narratives by the written word is the overall agony over the decline of indigenous languages. Indigenous elders, scholars and cultural resource representatives continue to voice concern over the continued erosion of locally based aboriginal oral languages and have opted to take up political causes in order to deal with the issue on a global scale aimed at seeking remedies to the present set of circumstances.

As the aboriginal educator Dr. Verna Kirkness publicly states;

The importance of language as an expression of culture, of who we are as a people, must be upheld by each individual, each family, each community, and each nation. As Fishman (1996) states, language is the mind, spirit, and soul of a people. Every effort must be made to protect, preserve, promote and practice our Indigenous/Aboriginal languages. We must gather into the circle all the knowledge, wisdom and energy we possess to ensure their survival. (Kirkness, 2002 p. 17)

It is not surprising to hear such sentiments from indigenous communities, considering the impending threat of the potential extinction of indigenous languages worldwide. Linguists, such as Krauss (1992a) predict that more than half of approximately 6,000 languages are now spoken by the adult population who do not teach their language to their younger generations. (Krauss, 1992a) In the coming century about 90% of languages that currently exist will no longer exist especially within colonized regions of the world such as North and South America, Africa, Australia and Southeast Asia (Robins & Uhlenbeck, 1991; Brenzinger, 1992; Schmidt, 1990). This particular set of statistics is especially alarming.

The affirmations of northern indigenous elders, educators and linguists alike emphasize the significance of the socio-economic outcomes if the urgency of the situation is not addressed. Aboriginal leaders' assertions that language is the foundation of indigenous culture are very integral to understanding the nature of the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication. Goody adds another piece to this equation He states that;

...if language is inextricably associated with 'culture', it is writing that is linked with 'civilization', with the culture of cities, with complex social formations though perhaps not quite so in direct a manner?" (Goody, 1987, p.3)

In other words language::culture::writing::civilization. The notion of language throughout the course of human history according to Walter Ong has always been essentially oral. The oral mode of communication superseded the written in this respect. He states that;

Wherever human beings exist they have a language and in every instance a language that exists basically as spoken and heard, in the world of sound (Sietwema 1995). Despite the richness of gesture elaborated sign languages are substitutes for speech and dependence on oral speech systems, even when used by the congenitally deaf (Kroeber 1972; Mallery 1972; Stokoe 1972). Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that all of the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in the course of human history and only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all. Of the some 3000 languages spoken that exist today only some 78 have a literature (Edmonson 1971, pp.323-332). There is as yet no way to calculate how other languages before writing came along. Even now hundreds of languages in active use are never written at all: no one has worked out an effective way to write them. The basic orality of language is permanent. (Ong, p. 6)

Ong's contentions are remarkable in the way they raise a whole range of following questions. How did oral language come to be so scrutinized and subjugated throughout the advent of the development of writing? How has the oral language been able to maintain itself through all the changes that it has endured over centuries? What continues to sustain the remnants of orality as a whole within the fabric of western based society? What does the future look like for the continued role of orality? Answers to questions like these are not easily attainable unless careful attention is devoted to the nature of the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication within western based society.

In a chronological sense, the origins of writing as we know it today dates back to approximately 3100 BC and is a relatively recent phenomenon as compared to the origins of human existence (Graff, 1987, p. 8). Through centuries the advancement of writing has had profound impacts on the oral mode of communication. According to Graff;

The chronology is devastatingly simple: Homo sapiens as a species is about 1,000,000 old; Western literacy from about 700-600 B.C., making it

roughly 2,600 years old; an printing from the 1450's, now ages a mere 430 years. This numerical exercise may appear frivolous, but a reflection upon this time sequence and its implications assist us in placing history in a larger, proper context. (Graff, 1987, p.8)

Harvey Graff contends that prior to the advent of literacy, oral societies possessed pictographic forms of images to represent transmissions of information as a way of recording events for mnemonic purposes. The role of collective memory then becomes an important element in the sequence of human history from this perspective. The intellectual issue at hand is whether or not these symbolic representations of graphic forms of writing can be considered as a system of writing as we know it within the fabric of western based society. Graff contents that the purpose of these graphic forms of writing was “not to describe or establish a correspondence between symbols and objects, nor were they directed at conventionalizing the relationships between object and marks” (Graff, 1987, p. 16). Rather, he reiterates that it was from early developments such as these that the emergence of written words were articulated.

North American based historians have echoed that northern indigenous people did not possess a written mode of communication. Victor P. Lytwyn who has completed and published extensive research on behalf of the Lowland Cree, or Swampy Cree of the north central regions of North America, articulate that:

Unfortunately, Lowland Cree oral traditions have not been extensively published and, until recently, little weight has been assigned to their validity as historical information. The Lowland Cree did not possess a literate tradition and the physical conditions in the lowlands quickly eroded many of the visible signs of past occupancy. (Lytwyn, 2002, p. 27)

Indigenous scholars, such as Winona Stevenson, a Cree woman originally from the Fisher River First Nation in east central Manitoba, wrote an article entitled “Calling Badger and the Symbols of the Spirit Language: The Cree Origins of the Syllabic System”. Stevenson's article note that here in North America the “Nehiyawak” or the Cree, were the first aboriginal nation in western Canada to acquire a written language. She says that:

Composed of syllabic characters, the written form of nehiyawewin, the Cree language can be found throughout Cree territory from Northern Quebec to Northeast British Columbia, and south to Montana. Cree syllabics arrived among the people in the early 1800's and were used extensively until quite recently. Over time, the English language replaced the daily use of Cree, the Cree syllabary fell into disuse. Today only a handful of Cree speakers still know and use it, though in the last decade or so, interest in reviving and utilizing Cree syllabics has grown tremendously. (Stevenson, 1999-2000, p.19)

Stevenson disputes the general consensus within the literary world that the missionary James Evans was the inventor of the Cree system of syllabics and that the origins were actually handed down to the Cree through deity. Such conclusions represent the opposing points of view regarding the origins of the Cree syllabics and in which one dominates over another simply for the sake of authenticity.

Goody mentions that other forms of complex graphic forms of representations among northern indigenous groups were the Ojibway Scrolls that were primarily used for recording ceremonial rituals (Goody, 1987, p. 30). Other examples that he cites are the Dakota Winter Counts. These indigenous types of orally based representations differed from the early western based written systems such as those of the Sumerians of Mesopotamia, according to Goody in that their use was not merely for the economic advancement of civilization as we know it within the fabrication of western based society. Goody's point that early forms of graphics preceded more complex notions of writing systems. Nevertheless, northern indigenous peoples have resorted to political activism in order to overcome the impacts of the marginalization of their oral voices by the written tradition within the fabric of western based society.

The Attrition of Kinship and Family Ties

The second area of concern as it relates to the variance in the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication is the attrition of northern indigenous kinship and family ties. The effort to determine the relationship between the oral understandings

and the written word must account for how the oral voices of northern indigenous women's perspectives, of how community and family life, have been adversely affected by the domination of the written word within the fabric of western based society. It would be pointless not to be able to identify how the representations of gender classes associate themselves within the structure of the relationship between the written and oral mode of communication. Clearly, some sort of physical and spiritual balance needs to establish itself in order for positive societal changes to occur in this regard for the benefit of both oral as well as written cultures alike. Cruikshank notes that;

Native women's stories differ from both Native men's accounts and from those of non-Native women. The recurring theme is one of connection-to other people and to nature. Connections with people are explored through ties of kinship; connections with land emphasize sense of place. But kinship and landscape provide more than just a setting for an account, for they actually frame and shape the story. (Cruikshank, 1990, p. 3).

When Cruikshank's assertions about the state of aboriginal women's oral narratives are examined closely enough, certain types of conceptual ideas become obvious such as racial equality, aboriginal female empowerment, spirituality with the environment, and the role of indigenous female identity. According to Kim Anderson, the notion of aboriginal womanhood is far more complex than logically anticipated in creating the balance in the communication between oral and written cultures within the western world. She says that;

I was interested in using interview material because I think the validity of the oral knowledge in our communities has been underestimated. As a young Native woman seeking information about my identity, I don't need to rely on a body of questionable literature: I can go and ask the aunties and grannies of my community for their perspectives and insights. This approach I took when I wrote the master's thesis that preceded this book; I interviewed only local women. I saw it as a traditional way of generating knowledge, one that is oral, collective and based on ongoing relationships within a community. The answers to my questions about Native womanhood lie within the stories philosophies and vision of my

friends, women I work with, people I meet in the community workshops I attend. No one of us has the “line” on Native womanhood, and no one of us has “solved” the question of our identity, but collectively our experiences begin to tell a story. (Anderson, 2000 p. 46)

The notion that aboriginal women’s knowledge is oral knowledge is a striking theme for the purposes of this assessment, one that is not readily available through the written mode of communication within the construction of western based society. When an aboriginal woman tells an oral story it becomes a powerful source of confirmation about collective community direction for the future. When an aboriginal woman tells a story about kinship values it becomes socially empowering and healing for her, her family and her community. Society really needs stop and listen when an aboriginal woman tells stories about herself, her family and her community, for this is how humanity is able to reproduce positive values about the sustenance of life. Both men and women have the capacity to tell stories. However, when the values of nurturing are the primary function of aboriginal women within orally based societies, it is the story that creates the ultimate balance of the spiritual power which originally comes from the aboriginal women’s relationship with nature itself. Stories of such roles of aboriginal women are rarely seen within the written tradition and this is a sad aspect within western based society. Evidence of this void is much too blatant and does nothing to narrow the dichotomy in the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication.

Laura Peters validates this when she writes;

Even after two decades of revision and challenges by feminist perspectives, it is rare to find a tribal or regional history or ethnography in which women play more than the most insignificant of roles. Secondary literature on Aboriginal peoples continues to focus extensively on men and their political, religious, and economic activities. In the pages of these works it is men who make the decisions, men whose words are quoted, and men’s achievements that are noted. Women are virtually invisible, their voices and movements stilled by the infrequency with which their work is noted and by the implications, when it is noted, that it was less

important to the group's survival and to the cultural context. (Peters, 2001, p. 40)

The absence of aboriginal women's oral voices within the written mode of communication is inexcusable from within the confines of western based society from an intellectual point of view. In contemporary times there is concern that indigenous people don't know their own locally based history and the younger generations are not being mentored through oral storytelling modes as they have been in earlier times. The chronologizing of indigenous genealogy, therefore, becomes extremely important to aboriginal women when telling their oral stories about family connections and community ties. Through mental process of indigenous genealogical chronologizing the children and youth are taught who their extended family members are as well as about the basic values of family connection and togetherness. As a point of reference Cruikshank, in her work with three Yukon female elders cite that;

I have ordered the account using a chronology that is roughly the one each woman instructs me is the "correct" way to tell her life story, beginning with her parents' genealogy, followed by her husband's genealogy leading eventually to her own birth. In each case the narrator enters her own life story only well into the account with a discussion of childhood then puberty then marriage, the various incidents form her mature years". (Cruikshank, 1990, p. 19)

The oral interpretations of family and community life have been severely affected by the imposition of western based patriarchal systems of governance. Through the written mode of communication, countless references are made to the demoralizing impacts of aboriginal women's place within the make up of community life. Efforts to regain sense of worth and dignity for northern aboriginal women are essential if we as a society are to lessen the dichotomy between the written and oral mode of communication. Anderson states that;

Whatever the intent, the patriarchal provisions of the Indian Act removed Native women from their roles as decision makers and teachers and robbed them of their voice in community affairs. Once active participants in the management of community affairs, they were forced into positions

that held little power. This deliberate state of action imposed on Native women the devalued position of women in western society. White women had no power to vote, they did not hold political positions and were not included in decision making on matters ranging from the family, to community, to nation. Native women who held political power were a threat to this kind of a system. (Anderson, 2000, p. 70).

The theme of the restoration of the balance of power of northern indigenous women's oral voices are essential in narrowing the gap in the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication within the fabrication of western based society. This, perhaps is one area of concern that requires urgent attention if the dichotomy is going to even itself out for the benefit of society as a whole.

The Legitimacy of Indigenous Prophecy Narratives

The third area of concern with respect to the dominance of the written word over the oral voice relates to the theme of the legitimacy of indigenous prophecy narratives. Cruikshank notes that the year of 1992 was a year of tremendous activity which increased the profile of the complexity of the social construction of history. (Cruikshank, 1998, p. 116). Ultimately, this particular year, as Cruikshank asserts, was a time of great transition from a type of neocolonialism to that of post colonialism, or a post colonial world order. However, Cruikshank does not define the context in which she uses the term, post colonialism, making it difficult for her readers to understand precisely what it is she is referring to. Considering the ambiguity of the term post colonialism, any attempt to define the term is an enormous task in itself.

Having said this, scholars such as Edward Chamberlain dispute the relevancy of post colonial theory on the role of the oral and written mode of communication as it pertains to the reality of people within their own communities. Chamberlain says that often enough society becomes too enthralled in the meaning of language rather than on the function and use of language and its usefulness. He says that memory is the power that the written words contain (Chamberlain, 2000, p. 125). Ultimately he is telling his readers that the usefulness of words is that they are just as powerful as the concept of survival itself. As to his discontent with the concept of post colonialism he states;

I must admit that I find “postcolonial theory” a rather intimidating phrase, partly because the word *theory* has become a mantra (mental device or instrument of thought) of high priests of my profession and partly because postcolonial seems to assume that we’re in a state of political grace – or a state of mind – that’s not always easy to recognize looking at the conditions in which many people live. Yet that is the key, that state of mind, for the hopeful fact is that, despite the conditions of dislocation, dispossession, and disease that colonialism creates and post colonialism chronicles, Aboriginal peoples the world over are still in possession of powers (Chamberlain, 2000, p. 131).

If this applies to the dominance of the written mode of communication clearly parallel lines of thought will emerge that in fact the idea that the dichotomy of the oral and written mode of communication within the fabric of western based society is a merely an illusion which is clearly not the reality. If post colonial theory applies, as Chamberlain suggests, to the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication then there would be nothing to prove or disprove in terms of the dichotomy between the two. To return to the essence of Cruikshank’s argument, since 1992, major theoretical discussions have transpired as a result of assessing the social construction of history and with regard to the place of the oral voice within the societal structure of life. Having said this, for the purpose of this discussion, it has been shown that the fabric of western based society has yet to deal with issues pertinent to the subjugation of the oral mode of communication. If this is the case, then ideally the concept of post colonialism has yet to reach its full implications. Often, it seems that northern indigenous prophecy narratives are not given sufficient space within the confines of western based society and as a result the full potential of the oral voice is not fully revealed in terms of how northern indigenous societies utilize the oral mode of communication to explain the predictions of the past, present and future according to their own epistemological revelations. Cruikshank brings to the forefront the nature of the academic debate surrounding the nature of indigenous prophecy when she says;

The ongoing academic debate about prophecy seems to follow on the behavior, activities, and predictions of particular prophets and to turn on two axes. In North American ethnohistory – writings by both historians and anthropologists – the central question seems to be whether prophetic movements were indigenous or a response to European contact (Cruikshank, 1998, p. 117)

It seems that the question of whether the world of prophecy was indigenous or not appears to rather inane, due to the fact that the validity of indigenous predictions of the sustainability of humanity into the future is not readily accepted by the dominant society as it is. It does not appear all that clear what the nature of the argument is as to whether prophetic movements originated as a European concept or not. The fact that more pressing matters of ideology ought to be dealt with, in terms of whether or not human beings accept or even care to even consider issues of the sustainability of life as a whole. Future outcomes of such a debate will be interesting. In the meantime, Cruikshank does present a rather insightful argument in this regard. She essentially argues that prophecy as it relates to northern indigenous cultures is a social phenomenon. Clearly, such an argument is good way to escape the issue of the relevancy of the role of prophecy in guiding indigenous reflections of northern historical events. It is then becomes quite obvious that the use of oral prophecy narratives to position and ground aboriginal perceptions do bring us one step closer to understanding the relationship between the oral and written communication within the fabric of western based society. The realm of attempting to legitimize prophecies that are generally founded on orally based knowledge of indigenous people's adaptation to immense societal and changes offers a whole range of alternative issues to consider. As previously mentioned in this essay, prophecy in northern indigenous oral societies, does create the primary basis for the theoretical notion of determinism which echoes the prospect of a predetermined state of human existence whether humanity wishes to accept the case or not. Cruikshank notes that within the written tradition, northern indigenous prophecies are treated not as common place, but as extraordinary phenomena. For instance she says that;

Whereas much of the scholarly literature treated prophecy as exceptional behavior needing analysis and interpretation, indigenous traditions in the southern Yukon Territory discuss prophecy as consistent with the routine behavior of shamans, well within the bounds of what these specialists were expected to do. It is the retrospect consideration of prophecy stories as routine explanation for contemporary events that interests me here. (Cruikshank, p. 1998, 117)

Taking this into consideration, the argument of the notion of the legitimacy of indigenous prophecy may be to some extent metaphorical within the written mode of communication. If indigenous prophecy is considered common place within the parameters of the oral mode of thought then it would be very interesting to be able to establish the link that is required for its acceptance by the written tradition as an acceptable form of looking at the broader realities of the world.

Conclusion

This review of the nature of the relationship or the dichotomy between the oral and written mode of communication has unraveled some startling insights. It has been a fascinating journey of discovery in this respect. It has been the goal of this paper to explore the nature of the relationship between the oral and written mode of communication within the fabric of western based society by addressing three main areas of concern that must be taken into consideration when examining the issue. Needless to say, that these three areas of concern are not all inclusive and the complexity of the issues are evident. Ultimately, other types of issues emerge as we begin to investigate further areas of concern such as the indigenous relationship with the northern landscape which extends beyond the scope of this work. In the end, it is obvious that the thesis as put forth at the onset that *northern indigenous oral narratives continue to be dominated by the written mode of communication which inadvertently serves as justification for the propagation of the dichotomy between the two* has been broadly confirmed. However, an examination of this argument has led me to think of the dichotomy between orality and writing systems through a whole different framework entirely. The interchange between

the oral and written mode of communication do present ultimate challenges for the role of diverse oral and written cultures that have made their home within the fabric of western based society. Hopefully, such issues will continue to be debated and theorized so that they can be placed into proper perspective for the benefit of humanity as a whole. This has been a good discussion.

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