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Indigenous voice, community, and epistemic violence: the ethnographer's "interests" and what "interests" the ethnographer

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This article visits the Menchú controversy, extending its critique to anthropologists who act as ventriloquists for Native communities. Anthropology, investing in the "power of culture," too often ignores the "culture of power." The "truth" of Native communities is viewed when the "interests" of anthropologists, along with the discipline's fixation on the subaltern, are dismantled. A more self-reflective ethnography has mutual benefit for both researchers and Indigenous communities.

Introduction

The controversy around Rigoberta Menchú's Testimonio is an old one for Indigenous[1] people. The questioning from those who have the power to claim the space and set the standards and boundaries for what counts as legitimate inquiry has changed little in a hundred years. Rigoberta Menchú, a Guatemalan Indian woman, gave accounts of military atrocities carried out against her people to one anthropologist, only to have the "truth" of her testimonio attacked by another anthropologist, David Stoll. In his book, Stoll (1999) seems excited to have discovered discrepancies in the numbers of people murdered, the locations where Rigoberta's family members were tortured, and where mass graves were located. He does not, in general, dispute that such things happened in Guatemala, he only exclaims that the "details" are exceedingly important because they show how Rigoberta Menchú's truth was told – as in Emily Dickinson's recommendation – with a slant. Stoll, of course, has a larger goal. He wants to nudge other anthropologists back into a preceding era of colonial cynicism sealing up the spaces of flux and transformation for listening to the Indigenous voice. The message is, "Don't be lulled out of a foot-tapping stiffened posture when listening to the Indigenous narrative. These people have an agenda and some of them may be aligned with popular movements on the left; some of them may be trying to stop U.S. corporate-backed military thugs from murdering their people. We must remain stolid and disinterested as scholars. We are only interested in truth; justice is down the hall, in political science . . . or philosophy perhaps." Stoll demands an empirical, and therefore presumably neutral and objective, interrogation of the Indigenous voice. He views an emergent openness to Indigenous discourse in the politics of identity and representation as a dangerous deference. Hence, his

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judgment of Rigoberta Menchú becomes a broader assertion about what standards are to be employed and who is to be believed when it comes to understanding the narratives about Indigenous communities. If individuals like Rigoberta Menchú are not authentic voices for oppressed communities, who can then speak for the Indigenous Other? His favorite? The anthropologist, of course.

Neither wolf nor dog: in the academy and the community

Tribal people, have, since contact, tried to tell their stories in ways that have made sense to them, but the colonizers – of all types – who heard these narratives often dismissed them as irrelevant ramblings of the uncivilized mind. The expectation now is that Indigenous people who write books and speak about serious matters will utilize a narrative form that responds to academic conventions. What is not expected, or accepted, is when an Indigenous person attempts to employ discursive forms that are premodern and part of an oral tradition in referencing events and conditions of the recent past and the present. I am referring to the ways that traditional Indigenous people fashion narratives that combine oral tradition and modern conversation patterns, making no distinctions between the two. Linda Smith (1999) has framed the issue clearly, pointing out that traditional Indigenous talk is viewed as "naive, contradictory and illogical" but the educated Indigenous intellectual is presumed to be inauthentic and unable to speak from a real Indigenous position (p. 14). This expected and insisted upon dualism, placing Indigenous scholars as too assimilated, not representing the real community and then positioning "real community" voices as not quite intelligible in the academy, has been the ideal situation for the nonnative anthropologist who can act as translator or interlocutor for the community voices. Edward Said (1978) points out that the Westerner could think about the Orient because "*he could be there*" and was free to construct the meaning of the Other (p. 7). The Indigenous Other has become the object for Western knowledge and the researcher is free to imagine Indigeneity without resistance. From these traveling researchers *who can be there* in Indigenous communities, we are told what is typical and what is not typical in the factionalized communities that *they* describe for us. I must clarify at this point that I do not mean to indict, wholesale, anthropology and *all* anthropologists with broad strokes. I mean to examine some specific and central tendencies of ethnography and the context of how researchers have entered Indigenous communities to study the Other. There are exceptions to the tendencies that I will review here, but they are exceptions. Richard Nelson's (1989) intentions for doing research with Aboriginal people are an example of an Anthropologist who has tried to learn something *from* rather than just *about* tribal people: "I undertook this work, not as a travel guide, but as a guide to non-travel. My hope is to acclaim the rewards of exploring the place in which a person lives rather than searching afar, of becoming fully involved with the near-at-hand, of nurturing a deeper and more committed relationship with home, and of protecting the natural community that sustains all who live there" (p. xii).

The truth that is told and the truth that is sold

In North America, the public has been willing to accept – and even "celebrate" – the stories of Aboriginal people when they are about ancient times, mythic events,

folklore and anything else that is removed from commentary on the actual economic and political conditions that tribal people experience. Native people do not speak of themselves as simply existing in the past though. As just one example, I have heard plateau elders and leaders employ coyote stories to illuminate the greed and foolishness of the White man and the hydroelectric dams that threaten some salmon species with extinction. However, when the forms and characters of oral tradition merge with stories that implicate or indict the inheritors of wealth and privilege, linking these trajectories to the destruction of Indigenous communities, such narratives are ignored or invalidated. For tribal people, an unnatural dualism is enforced; they can be traditional only if they remain as an exotic artifact of the past, or they can participate in language and society as a modern individual keeping tradition confined within the realm of personal or private knowledge, distanced from informing public life or policy. Certain rules are enforced by the hegemony of this conversation: the past must be segregated from the present; land must be kept apart from identity and ideology.

Debates about the legitimacy of Indigenous narratives parallel the concerns about ethnographic criticism, which are that it "undermines the ability of social scientists to sort out 'true' stories from 'false,' or that it promotes a sophomoric skepticism at the very historical moment in which feminist and Third World voices begin to challenge the epistemic authority of the white male academy" (Meyer & Klein, 1998, p. 188). In other words, after the recent decades of Indigenous struggle to gain a place in the academy, the potency and stature of *all* claims to truth have deteriorated in a climate of relativistic doubt. But, Indigenous people did not come to the academy to play word and idea games.[2] In general, Native people have come to the university to have their stories forged into concrete change for their communities. The change that is needed must be built on a community conversation which listens to the collective histories and moral narratives about place that frame the possibilities and vision. It is at once a narrative that is political, describing the economic and cultural conditions of tribal peoples, and at the same time an ethnohistoric telling of precontact conditions and values which were dislocated by colonialism. The intellectual self-determination of Indigenous people is woven from the translucent vision of an era where things were very different and from a serious assessment of how things are now. It is an open desire to acknowledge the mythic[3] proportions of historic community reality while confronting the present conditions of that community.

It is this syncretism of Indigenous narrative that is so contentious and so problematic within the academy. That is, when Indigenous people speak in storytelling ways that blur conventional distinctions between rationality and ethnopoetics they are dismissed both as not being colorful and "pure" enough to be interesting to the outsider gaze and, at the same time, not "truthful" enough to be taken seriously with regard to what counts as evidence and cogency in universities, courts of law, and public opinion. However, for Aboriginal people, this blending of older ways of seeing and knowing with contemporary awareness and technological skills offers a sustaining and transformative education. This transformative Indigenous vision is quite outside the ideologies of both the Left and Right. The Stoll book reverberates around ideologies related to individualism, the marketplace, and underlying assumptions about power and history; it relies on a batch of taken-for-granted American populist beliefs. It is thinly cloaked in the shallow language of disinterested scholarship and wholly transparent in its advocacy

for neo-liberal forms of social control. While neo-conservative assaults on Indigenous identity and politics have been well illuminated by the contributors to this journal, scant attention is usually paid to the policies and plagues of materialist social theories. Indigenous goals and values have been trampled on by Marxists as well as by corporate evangelists. The treatment of the Miskito peoples by the Sandinista government in Nicaragua presents an instructive case study on how the Left has misunderstood or ignored Indigenous epistemology and claims to land. Thomas Berger (1991), in writing about the Nicaraguan setting, has commented that "Marxism, like capitalism, is a European ideology which sees no place for indigenous peoples' forms of land tenure" (p. 109). It must be observed that the situation for Indigenous communities in Latin America is unique, immersed in the histories of brutal domination by multinational corporations amid the muscle of U.S. military operations. Likewise, the testimonio, Menchú's contested medium, is a uniquely Latin American form of text that emerges within the space of this history. In this essay I wish to move somewhat outside the specifics of the Latin American context and into a broader discussion of what many anthropologists do in tribal communities; how they operate out of a particular set of interests. I am not greatly concerned with exposing David Stoll's ethnographic conduct since it is extreme, obvious, and will continue to be regarded as dubious and marginal scholarship by mainstream anthropology. This is not to casually dismiss it since I think it is a dangerous piece of work and will act to fanaticize a quasi-academic populist readership eager to excoriate and dismantle openings to Indigenous experience, struggle, and community development. Rather, I wish here to talk about the more subtle and elusive aspects of ethnographic hegemony at the hands of anthropologists who are not on a neo-conservative iconoclastic crusade, but rather simply doing the mainstream studies that get turned into books and careers. I wish to talk about the truth that gets told, and the truth that gets sold.

A Coastal Salish case study of truth telling and White denial

My work with the Lummi community in the northwest corner of Washington State gives some glimpses into how truth telling is negotiated around and between the performance of a story and the power imbalances of the space in which the story is listened to. I should be clear at this point that my personal and professional narratives converge in this setting. My "work" was not simply that of a university researcher, but also the real work of sweeping floors, driving a school van, and moving heavy objects when needed. All this while teaching high school classes and listening to the stories of elders, parents, and kids. See Marker (2001) for a more detailed account of my "work." The Lummis are a Coastal Salish people who have had some success in Federal court cases dealing with fishing rights and the interpretations of 19th-century treaties protecting their land and resources. The Point Elliot Treaty of 1855 is the most important treaty for Lummis and the signing of this treaty which guaranteed government obligations and fishing rights is commemorated each year in tribal ceremony. However, from the beginning of contact, the U.S. government and the White society set the terms for what would count as "truth" and how that truth would be spoken; the Indigenous voice was constrained and repressed. In the 1850s, territorial governor Issac Stevens, under directives from Washington, DC to quickly negotiate land deals clearing the Pacific

Northwest region for settlement, refused to allow tribal leaders to voice their perspectives in their own languages. Instead, Stevens insisted that the land and resources be talked about using the Chinook Jargon, a crude trading language of approximately 400 words. Developed for negotiations between trappers and Indians, and useful for transactions involving horses, canoes, and utensils, it had an early utility for Indians and Whites. However, relying strictly on the Jargon, it was impossible to convey deep and subtle meanings about Coastal Salish cosmology, relationships, and the sacred meaning of the land. Using the Chinook Jargon at the Point Elliot treaty negotiations reduced the discourse about land, people, and desire to a hurried, commodified exchange which resulted in compressing Native people onto small reservations to be served by a team of government agents, missionaries, and businessmen who would eventually find ways to carve even more land from these destitute communities. Alexandra Harmon (1998), citing Swan, noted that Indians regarded the Jargon "as a sort of white man's talk" (p. 61). Vine Deloria (1977), in writing about the treaties, emphasized how the Jargon favored the Whites not only because the Indians could not communicate their deepest understandings of land and history, but because the actual intentions of the treaties were obscured by the rough and simplistic quality of the language (pp. 57–58). The Native voice, in 1855, had to be filtered through the crude language of commodification. Even so, the treaty reserved the Indians' right to continue fishing at their accustomed locations. It was this 1855 document that was interpreted by federal Judge George H. Boldt in 1974 to mean that Puget Sound tribes had always reserved 50% of the salmon catch for themselves.

The 1974 Boldt decision produced a severe White backlash[4] in Puget Sound communities, particularly in the schools. The conditions for Lummi students, especially at the public high school, were very tense. Many of the teachers were fishermen who were opposed to Indian fishing rights, construed as "special rights" by anti-Indian neo-conservatives. Narratives about and from Indians became a political rather than a cultural expression. Of course, the political is always cultural and the cultural is likewise political. However, the American "melting pot" zeitgeist is awash in this kind of false dualism. The mentality behind this narrow populism is that "culture" should be confined to a kind of personal "folk festival" and should not enter into the realm of the political, which is viewed as a separate and "cultureless" realm. Culturally specific forms that favor the dominant mainstream are treated as normative assumptions while those who are identified as cultural Others are expected to perform their culture in ways that are exoticized or commodified. Lummis could only safely refer to their culture in stereotypical vignettes, and the salmon, a central component of the culture, could not be talked about at all in the explosive climate of the classroom.

When Lummis told about violence and racism in the schools, the White community characterized their narratives as exaggeration or fantasy. Lummis, in telling about their lives at the school, spoke in a kind of general language of indictment that often omitted specific details and dates of events. The White school and community could easily defend against claims about history and identity by pointing out that Lummi narratives were both fanciful and predictable as vague complaints. Usually the tribal perspective, that the public school was a place where they had been pushed to the margins and eventually pushed out by institutional racism, was ignored by the White community. I conducted interviews with both Lummis and Whites trying to get to the "truth," not only of what happened at the

school and in the community, but of what it meant as a larger pattern of Indian–White tensions and Lummi marginalization. As someone who has lived and worked in both the Lummi and White communities, I traversed a divided landscape asking questions and listening to stories as well as some uncomfortable silences from Whites on the meaning of the school. Indeed, I was a researcher, an ethnographer. I viewed the work as a kind of writing down of community conversations across the cultural barricades. I was both insider and outsider in both worlds. Apart from the listening to and writing down of the variety of interpretations of the meaning of this history in both Indian and White communities, my goal was to understand something about the nature of what happened at one particular high school. My goal was to become more informed about a complicated reality in order to foster a more intelligent and inclusive conversation. I did not anticipate how contentious even these efforts at conversation would become. A number of Lummi tribal members had suggested I do this study which, as I attempted to understand underlying forms and forces, quickly moved in concentric circles away from the high school. I believed then, and I believe now, that we must not abandon the notion that something happened in the past apart from an endless debate over subjectivities and interpretations. Most importantly, I believe that we must attend to an analysis of power in order to explain the dynamics of settings. Like William G. Tierney (2000), I avoided looking for an "absolutist reading of events, histories and circumstances that are inevitably contested." I was attempting to engage in "the creation of the real" (p. 112). I tried to describe what happened as I tried to delineate the divided interpretations of what happened. I found documents and testimony that offered a clear indictment of the state educational institutions, including the local university. The most outrageous incident featured a professor who won an academic freedom case arguing that Lummis were genetically inferior (Marker, 2000). It is a sensational example of more elusive, and perhaps more sinister, expressions of racism. It is outrageous both because of the professor's explanations of Lummi inferiority, applying a fanciful history of west coast slavery, and because no campus or regional newspaper ever covered the story. When I began to discuss my work publicly, I found that most non-Natives in the educational system – especially at nearby Western Washington University – were not very interested in Lummi narratives about oppression, power, and identity. It became clear to me that the White community never disputed the "truth" of the stories that Lummis told, they only saw that they had no stake in these truths and they found them dull. Calling them isolated incidents and exaggerations was a discursive move to discard them rather than a move to refute their validity.

When I began doing the research on Lummi schooling during the fishing wars,[5] tribal people were enthusiastic and encouraged me because they said, "we've told our stories for years now, maybe if someone like you from a university writes things down in the right way, the people in charge will pay attention and change things. At least they won't be able to say it isn't true what happened to us and our kids." At Lummi, people were eager to read the research and the community library made a number of copies that always seemed to be checked out. But, one afternoon I began to question the real potency of ethnographic research when a Lummi woman told me that, "it was good to write all this down so outside people know what happened, but in the end, it won't do much because the White people at the university know all this anyway and it doesn't change them." Having a university researcher show the validity of the stories with empirical evidence and analysis did

not solve the fundamental problem: the stories about racism were simply not interesting to Whites.

Looking in all the wrong places

While a number of Indigenous scholars have proposed that non-Natives should not be doing research in tribal communities any longer,[6] this misses the fundamental problem. Elsewhere I have argued that "the quality of research is not improved *simply* by having Aboriginal people doing the writing. It is improved by a more detailed analysis that includes the perspectives and location of both Natives and non-Natives" (Marker, 2001, p. 31). This means an analysis of history, hegemony, and, self. Unfortunately, because of the context of competitive careerism in the academy, ethnographers are both in a hurry and selective about whom they talk to and get information from. They want to get something published and they need to get the attention of editors and reviewers. Often, the themes of Indigenous communities that *they* are most interested in are the ones that are exotically titillating and sealed off from larger considerations of history and power with regard to dominant state and corporate pressures. Researchers have recently discovered that Indigenous communities are not homogenous and so have been fascinated with the internal disputes, contradictions, and gossip about families and factionalism that reverberates in all communities, Indigenous or not. This has really become simply another chapter in the history of the colonial gaze at the Indigenous other. Instead of perpetuating the myth of frozen exotic sameness about tribal society, these studies become a day in the life of colorful but confused subaltern individuals trying to maintain a sense of ritual and tradition in a world of cell phones and laptops. The text is written more conscious of political correctness, but not necessarily more respectfully. The storytelling theater has been renovated, but the ventriloquists remain the same. This new self-conscious but not necessarily self-reflective writing has emerged out of some misguided efforts to avoid essentializations of the Indigenous other. The problem is that such an approach tends to neutralize a more dialectical cultural comparison and analysis of power. It must also be admitted that it is the *ethnographers'* needs that are being fulfilled, not the needs of Indigenous communities. Odawa scholar Cecil King (1997) laments, "We acknowledge, with gratitude, the attempts by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Anthropological Association to regulate researchers by guidelines or codes of ethics. However, for most of us, these efforts are part of the problem. For we must ask: Whose ethics?" (p. 118).

Indigenous scholars, few and far between compared with the numbers of anthropologists and critical theorists who are studying Indigenous people, occasionally find time to challenge the "truth" of these "community studies." Two good examples of discord between anthropologists and community-based Indigenous scholars are Daisy Sewid Smith's (1997) response to Harry F. Wolcott's description of a Kwakiutl[7] potlatch and Jo-Ann Archibald's (2000) review of anthropologist Crisca Bierwert's ethnography of Coastal Salish Communities. Both essays raise questions about what the anthropologists paid attention to and how activities such as the private spiritual practices of the communities were discussed carelessly and disrespectfully in a public fashion. Archibald observes that Bierwert's book "presents Stolo people as fraught with family violence, as suffering

exceptionally low employment, and as wrestling with never-ending fishing issues" (p. 111). A parallel complaint is that the larger historic and political landscape is quickly and perfunctorily brushed over. The focus is on the Indigenous communities, or rather on the factionalism, internal power struggles, and dysfunctional relationships in these communities as though they were hermetically sealed off from the outside world.

There is virtually no analysis of historical and cultural forces outside the tribal community – forces that have disrupted and distorted traditional social and economic relations while consolidating wealth and power for Whites in these regions.

The categories for what counts as true, significant, and even interesting are constructed by the researchers as they apply their own hierarchy of concepts to the inquiry process. For example, researchers who write about Indigenous communities are often focused on issues of identity as a fundamental issue. In the case of Rigoberta Menchú, challenging her identity as a *genuine* Indigenous voice was an important part of Stoll's strategy. This is a hegemonic move that denies other epistemic possibilities about identity and place. James Clifford (1988) has explored the substrata of these kinds of tensions:

> Yet what if identity is conceived not as a boundary to be maintained but as a nexus of relations and transactions actively engaging a subject: The story or stories of interaction must then be more complex, less linear and teleological. What changes when the subject of "history" is no longer Western? How do stories of contact, resistance, and assimilation appear from the standpoint of groups in which exchange rather than identity is the fundamental value to be sustained? Events are always mediated by local cultural structures. (p. 344)

Too many researchers go into Indigenous communities armed with a set of questions and concepts that they apply to their selective listening to selected Native informants. Identity is one of the taken-for-granted questions. It does not matter if identity, in the way the researcher thinks of it, is not constructed by the community in ways consistent with the researcher's understanding. What if identity is not very important to a particular group of Indigenous people, but rather relationships and a more elusive, more difficult to describe, mythic connection to place? Are researchers who encounter this shape-shifting willing to let go of their expectations and allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the unsettling sensation of flux and uncertainty about truth? Will they let Indigenous people tell them what is important to study and learn about? Or, will they continue to insist on defining Indigenous people in ways that suit their academic disciplines, their careers, and their political agendas? To really learn about Indigenous communities is to learn about oneself and researchers are not trained for this encounter. The emphasis on describing the internal intricacies of Indigenous communities without a sufficient analysis of the larger region's history of power differentials encourages anthropologists to use a magnifying glass, when they ought to be using a mirror.

The knower and the known

An authentic listening to the cultural Other should produce more than a fascination with the exotic: it should provoke an awakening to the cultural "self."

This would mean that conventional assumptions about the history and structure of the researcher's own cultural presumptions would be unraveled by engaging with and actually learning from the perspective of Indigenous people. Of course, this does not mean to reverse the fallacy by suggesting that all activities and structures in Indigenous communities have parallels in dominant postindustrial societies, it is only to suggest that such a learner's stance destabilizes the anthropologist's dubious claim to being the expert on that Indigenous community. Clifford Geertz (1995) points out that, "the mere claim 'to know better' which it would seem any anthropologist would have at least implicitly to make, seems at least faintly illegitimate" (p. 5). Vine Deloria (1997) is even more to the point: "It is now time to reverse this perspective and use the values, behaviors, and institutions of tribal or primitive peoples to critique and investigate the industrial societies and their obvious shortcomings" (p. 220).

Listening to the Indigenous voice in a reflexive mode is consistent with Marcus and Fischer's (1986) recommendation for an anthropology of self-conscious cultural critique recognizing that what anthropologists pay attention to is a political choice since "there are multiple sides and multiple expressions of possibilities active in any situation" (p. 116). The truth, then, is constructed partly out of what researchers are willing to pay attention to and how they interpret what they are being told.

A number of anthropologists and critical theorists have responded to calls for a more reflexive listening to the Native voice by positioning themselves in a dubious advocacy role with regard to Indigenous community issues. We are subjected to a new version of the old pudding sometimes named collaborative, or dialogic, methodologies. However, this stance is too often a continuation of the neoliberal goal of offering support to oppressed minorities without challenging the power and cultural position of dominant groups. Laura Nader (1974) challenged anthropology to "study up" three decades ago. Unheeded, this is still the most fruitful, imaginative, and transformative way to listen to the Indigenous voice, to "ask many 'common sense' questions in reverse. Instead of asking why some people are poor, we would ask why other people are so affluent? . . . Anthropologists might indeed ask themselves whether the entirety of field work does not depend upon a certain power relationship in favor of the anthropologist, and whether indeed such dominant subordinate relationships may not be affecting the kinds of theories we are weaving" (p. 289). Aanishinabe scholar and activist Winona La Duke, in talking about her tribal community's struggles, focused on the invisibility of the histories of power and privilege and how Americans have glamorized wealth: "We quite often do not ask how they got to be rich. We don't ask if they paid fair wages to people who worked in their plants, or if they got rich stealing someone else's land, or stealing someone else's natural resources" (speech at Western Washington University, December 6, 2001). Eric Wolf (1999), in exploring the anthropology of power, offers a broader but nonetheless useful prescription: "Seeking answers to such questions, however, also requires us to go beyond the ethnographic present – the moment in which the ethnographer collects and records his observations – to locate the object of our study in time. It is not the events of history we are after, but the processes that underlie and shape such events" (p. 8). The processes are, of course, much larger than what goes on in the day-to-day life of an Indigenous community.

It is unlikely that anthropology will take on a general interest in the *culture of power.* The discipline has too much invested in the *power of "culture."* Sherry B.

Ortner (1994) concluded an essay on changes in anthropological theory by observing that "practice has qualities related to the hard times of today; pragmatism, maximization of advantage, 'every man,' as the saying goes, 'for himself' " (p. 403). Anthropologists have developed a set of conceptual tools for dissecting the Indigenous identity and voice, but just like the proverbial high school biology exercise, the pieces of the frog strewn about the lab table do not contain the meaning of the frog. And, like the dissecting tools of the biology lab, the anthropologist's tools work best toward purposes that are directly connected to its history and development as a colonial enterprise. "Empowering" or "advocating" for Indigenous communities is a suspiciously ethnocentric and patronizing goal. Many Indigenous groups would find the language itself offensive and presumptuous since they maintain that they were never conquered and hence have never relinquished their "power." Nevertheless, it remains a popular methodological orientation because it retains the utility of anthropology's fundamental dissecting tools, which are oriented toward analysis of a cultural subaltern. Anthropologists have been generally reluctant to pack up their toolboxes and go off seeking information on cultures of power. Describing identity formation, cultural transmission, voice, authority, and social organization among corporate executives, government officials, and privileged upper class families taxes and problematizes anthropological tools and methods. For too many researchers, it is more fun and rewarding – not to mention safer – to imagine themselves "adopted" by a tribe and "collaborating" to help solve some problem that the tribe has. What if the tribe's "problem" is that too many useless studies have been conducted without any analysis of structures that have distorted and dislocated their community from the traditional values which hold people together? Micaela di Leonardo (1998) has stated the problem clearly: "American anthropology, as we shall see – despite the vigorous and careful efforts of some – relies on an implicit and therefore entirely untheorized, American 'home'. Its metropolitan gaze misses its own reflection" (p. 16). It is useless to support subaltern groups without concomitantly exposing and destabilizing the hegemonic forces that continue to oppress them, just as it is useless to listen to the Native voice without paying attention to the countervailing voices of power and privilege. Gregory Bateson (1972) put it in basic language: "Tools are for purposes and anything which blocks purpose is a hindrance" (p. 49).

Truth resides in places

From an Indigenous perspective, the "truth" not only needs to be placed within larger dimensions of history and power, it must be experienced in actual places on the landscape. In his book *Wisdom sits in places: Landscape and language among the Western Apache*, Keith Basso (1996) explains how Apache people regard the land, linked with the oral tradition, as containing the moral authority which undergirds truth and social structuring. Julie Cruikshank (1998), working with Native women in the Yukon, has made similar observations about the intertwining of land, story, and knowledge. The experience has directed her thoughts to fundamental questioning of dominant conventions about knowledge and texts: "What are the consequences of categorical practices that distance people from lived experience? How does authorizing knowledge change its social function? Is a passion for

universalizing peculiar to the West, or is it part of a more global process" (p. 70)? A genuine encounter with the Indigenous voice is an engagement that taps into transformative moral dimensions. The oral traditions were structured often so that they would trouble the listener's soul. And the spirits of the stories, dwelling in the soul of the land, would awaken the deepest sense of self in the learner. This awakening has been all too rare as elders have watched researchers "grow in their knowledge and understanding of our ways. But, unfortunately, many times we have been betrayed. Our honored guests have shown themselves to be no more than peeping toms, rank opportunists, interested in furthering their own careers by trading in our sacred traditions" (King, 1997, p. 115). Sometimes though, as in the works of Basso, Cruikshank, and a few others, the researcher becomes the learner, in a space of meaning that is difficult to explain without actually being in that geographic place again.

An archeology student told me this story: She was working with a team that was consulting with Tlingit elders about the location of an ancient village site in Alaska, and as they sat in the town's school gymnasium, the directors of the project were growing impatient with the lack of progress. They showed the elders maps, descriptions of artifacts, and analyses of the geology, but the old people were silent. Frustrated, the anthropologists took a break to decide on another strategy to extract the information they needed for their research. This student had lived with one of the traditional Native families and had worked hard over the summer cooking for a fishing boat. She was well liked by the local people and, in this context, on the morning while the crew drank coffee and tried to strategize their communication styles, an old man silently took her hand and pulled her outside. "Follow me," he said. "Are we going far?" she asked. The old man simply said, "you are asking questions about that village, you must follow me." They walked over ridges and grassy bluffs, through a thick forest and down to a glacier carved coastline. They walked all day and into the twilight summer night. She was exhausted when they finally stopped and he showed her an enormous rockslide that rolled out into a remote bay. "Here," he said, "many years ago a terrible earthquake pushed this mountain down on top of the village. Many families died in the terror of this rockslide which has covered the place. If you are very still, you can feel spirits and the sadness here." She wept uncontrollably and when she regained composure, the elder said, "you feel it now, don't you? The questions you were asking at the gym in town don't belong there. The questions you were asking belong here. Now you understand."

Examining the identity and interests of researchers

I was in the Petén region of Guatemala a few years ago on a teaching and research trip with some tribal college students. While many of these American Indian students had come from impoverished reservations and families, they still, by Guatemalan standards, seemed affluent since they wore expensive sport shoes and carried cameras and CD players. One humid morning, some of the villagers gathered to hear the tribal college students tell about their educational and career goals. The Itsa Mayan youth who sat in the audience had few questions for their American counterparts, but later that day an elder, who was teaching us the uses of Indigenous plants and the complexity of regional ecology, talked about

how corporate-media-fueled appetites were poisoning the souls of Indigenous youth *everywhere*. "In our village 'la juventúd' are developing 'la enfermedad del espiritu,' [spirit sickness]." Because we had spent several days with him talking about the land, the stories, and the legacy of colonialism, we knew that his declaration about the poisoning of young spirits included an invocation of this history and its meanings as a way to crystallize – and cauterize – the political/cultural moment. There were certainly countervailing "truths" available. Throughout Guatemala, and even in the village, many people would contradict the old man's perspective; that which is called "poisons" becomes named "opportunities." The omnipresent multinational logos and US military uniforms worn by the Guatemalan soldiers saturated the setting for the momentary truth telling of this elder. Yet, his truth, like Rigoberta Menchú's testimonio, had a compelling force which pushed a small, but profound, space open in a crowded marketplace of noisy truths. It was, in spite of everything, a self-evident truth. He told this truth to us with the compelling intensity of a human being who has seen terrible things. However, had I been, for some reason, dissatisfied with his speech and its assumptions about history, epistemology, and teleology, I am confident that I could have found individuals to contradict his assumptions. Given enough time and resources, it is probable that I could have even found and interviewed individuals who would have defamed the elder and challenged his legitimacy, authority, and identity. Was his exhortation untrue, then? What does this mean then? I think it means that at a certain point in these exchanges we must look away from the speaker and shift our attention to the values and motives of the ethnographer (the listener). It also means that David Stoll's disclaimer that he is not attempting to refute the "general" history of oppression and genocide that occurred in Guatemala must be viewed with some suspicion. He has shaped an argument, but it is dangerously stripped of an analysis of power and culture. It is not the disinterested academic; there *is* no disinterested academic. Historical analysis stripped of its attention to power differentials is neither good scholarship, nor responsible social discourse. Dirks, Eley and Ortner (1994) have explained how "history itself has variable cultural form – that the shape of events, the pace of time, the notion of change and duration, the very question of what an event is – all of these things are not simply objective realities, but are themselves products of cultural assumptions. . . . Culture as emergent from relations of power and domination, culture as a medium in which power is both constituted and resisted" (p. 6).

I must stop at this point and confess that in revising this essay I became concerned that I was being too hard on anthropologists. Indeed, anthropology is steeped in a vigorous debate about how to transform itself in an increasingly compressed and marketized academy. Eric Wolf (1999) pointed to "a basic tension between this major contribution – our critical perspective – and the institutional contexts in which we must gain our livelihood" (p.38). Still, while anthropologists try to redefine themselves as *not* being intellectual "summer people," they continue to view themselves as the advisors and helpers to the "cultured" poor and not much interested in the culture of the rich. Reviewing some recent issues of *Anthropology News* I came across numerous examples of this kind of self-styled advocacy for the subaltern, but scant appeals to study up. Typical is this commentary: "Instead of seeing the people among whom we do our research and action as exotic, we will see them as the oppressed and

underserved, both here and abroad" (Chrisman, 2002, p. 4). I do not think I am being too hard on anthropologists.

Stoll's book has a particular quality that makes it primarily an American cultural – or media – product. I suspect that in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and other countries with large Indigenous populations, his writing would seem irrelevant and much ado about nothing. Clearly, the book is specifically marketed for an audience steeped in the discourse modeled by former Secretary of the Interior, James Watt: "If you want an example of the failures of socialism . . . go to the reservations . . . every social problem is exaggerated because of socialistic government policies on the Indian reservations" (quoted in Esber, 1992, p. 216). Such cold war bigotry is an enduring residue of American attitudes toward Native people. Americans, wanting some good news about the "intention," if not the outcome, of U.S. military and economic policy in Latin America could find Stoll's good Indians on the right and the bad ones on the left. An exposé of Indians and leftists is, for this audience, a welcome intellectual analgesic. Again, we should be more attentive to who Stoll is, rather than who the informants are at this juncture. In short, Stoll wants to sell a book and advance a career; in point of fact, he has done both; *like other anthropologists who have written about Indigenous communities*. This book has gotten so much attention primarily because it is ideologically profitable for the media and ideologically unnerving for mainstream anthropologists who want to sell books which advocate for tribal people in *opposition* to corporate "tribes." An explication of power and its histories escapes the approaches of both Stoll and the "other friends" as economic and cultural assumptions go unchallenged.

We should begin to ask ethnographers to identify themselves in terms of these cultural assumptions and histories. Some modest efforts to uncloak these context factors and ethnographic "choices" for what to listen to might help us to understand that a lie is not simply an untruth told; it is also a truth untold. Vine Deloria (1997) concludes that "asking anthropology to undertake a new task, particularly a task with such a high potential for disturbing the secure financial base from which scholars have always comfortably moved to examine the exotic tribal peoples of the world, is a rather hazardous request and one likely to be rejected out of hand. But it is a necessary request because it basically asks scholars to develop a personal identity as concerned human beings and move away from the comfortable image of 'scholar' " (p. 221).

Those researchers/learners who adopt a respectful position as concerned human beings might gain unique insights into themselves as they come to understand the reality of Indigenous people. They might also come to see that what "interests" many anthropologists is only vaguely related to the reality of Indigenous communities and more directly related to their own career "interests."

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Notes

1. It is becoming a more common practice to capitalize words like Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native, in writing that denotes significant historical, cultural, and political distinctions for the peoples who claim these categories for themselves as a fundamental aspect of their identity. I have chosen to capitalize Indigenous as a way to apply a signifier in this regard.
2. Clearly, Chippewa author and Native studies professor Gerald Vizenor's work should be noted as an exception in that he is primarily interested in "discovering the play in a word" (Coltelli, 1990, p. 175).
3. Words such as "myth" are easily misunderstood. I do not mean to perpetuate colloquial notions that myth is not "true" or somehow less valid than "science." I use this term distinctly to refer to ways that Indigenous peoples experienced place, space, and time linked to transcendent moral and spiritual forms. I am also referencing a broad discussion of historiography and metaphysics which reverberates around the works of Calvin Martin (1978), William Cronon (1983), Vine Deloria (1995), and others.
4. Backlash refers to the heightened tensions and attacks on Indigenous people and their claims to space and identity which have accompanied legal victories in the courts in the United States. Anti-tribal ideology is linked to neo-conservative populism and finds expression in media and educational discourse.
5. The 1960s and 1970s have been called the era of fishing wars in the Pacific Northwest. In Puget Sound tensions between Indian and non-Indian fishermen became violent as boats were rammed and guns were fired. Boxberger (1989) has chronicled the Lummi experience of the "fishing wars."
6. See Swisher (1998) and King (1997) as two examples of the indictment of non-Native researchers. Lomawaima (2000) reviews the history of abuses by researchers and displays the strict guidelines by which present tribal councils grant permission to study "with" Aboriginal people.
7. More correctly, Kwakwaka'wakw. The spelling and pronunciation have changed over time to more accurately reflect the way Kwakwala-speaking people on Vancouver Island refer to themselves.

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