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The Power of Medicine:

"Healing" and "Tradition" Among Dene Women

in Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories

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March 1996

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Masters of Arts.

ISBN 0-612-12022-8

Canada

ABSTRACT

Dene women are leading and directing efforts toward "healing" themselves, their families, and their communities. Employing a modality of montage and storytelling, this thesis explores this enigmatic concept of "healing" among Dene, and its gendered dimensions, in the community of Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories. This account challenges the limitations of a resistance-hegemony paradigm often used to describe Aboriginal actions as embedded within colonial relations, and endeavours toward a more nuanced analysis which explores Dene "healing" beyond the colonial space. "Healing" is emerging as a vehicle for the assertion and celebration of Dene identity, Dene tradition and "Dene ways". This thesis further explores how many Dene women in Fort Good Hope are mobilizing the power of tradition, such as *-aet'sechí* (practices associated with "becoming woman"), as a means of "healing" social/health concerns, and influencing gender and power relations in the community.

RÉSUMÉ

Actuellement, les femmes dènèes mènent et dirigent les efforts envers "healing" d'eux-mêmes, de leurs familles, et de leurs communautés. En utilisant une modalité de montage et de l'art de conter, cette thèse explore la notion énigmatique de "healing" chez les Dènès, surtout en ce qui concern le sexe, dans la communauté de Fort Good Hope, Territoires Nord-Ouest. Ce récit mise en question les limites d'un paradigm de resistance-hégémonie, souvent employé de décrire les actions d'Autochtones comme enfoncé seulement dans l'espace des relations coloniales. Plutôt, cette narration entreprend une analyse nuancée qui explore "healing" chez les Dènès au-delà de cet espace colonial. "Healing" devient de plus en plus un moyen de l'assertion et de la célébration de l'identité dènèe, de la tradition dènèe, et des "manières dènèes" ("Dene ways"). Cette thèse examine ègalement comment plusieurs femmes dènèes de Fort Good Hope mobilisent la puissance de tradition, surtout *-aet'sechí* (les pratiques associées avec "devenir femme"), comme un façon de "healing" les problèmes socials/santés, et influencent les rapports de pouvoir et de sexe dans la communauté.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The topic of "healing" in Aboriginal communities is an enigmatic and complex one, and I found it a daunting task to tackle this issue in such a short space and brief amount of time. At this point I am able to offer, by way of this thesis, one perspective on "healing" among Dene women in Fort Good Hope, N.W.T. And although I take full responsibility for the opinions and perceptions presented, I owe a great number of people enormous thanks for their assistance and support which came in an array of shapes, forms, and sizes.

I would especially like to extend my gratitude to the people of Fort Good Hope who welcomed me into their community, and who generously shared with me their thoughts and their ideas, their space and their time, alongside their friendship and companionship, and not to mention, their meat and fish, and their boats and tents! The richness of all that I learned cannot be tallied; indeed, I am still in the process of trying to understand all that people shared with me. I can never thank people enough for their patience and understanding, for their instruction and guidance, for their kindness and generosity. I would like particularly to acknowledge several people and their families who supported me in a wide variety of ways: Charlie Barnaby, Florence and George Barnaby, Brian Davidson, George Grandjambe, Shirley and Barry Harley, Lucy and Wilfred Jackson, Shirley Kakfwi, Clara and Gordon Kelly, Millie and Isidore Manuel, Georgina and Barney Masuzumi, Sharon and Ron Pierrot, Laura and Charlie Tobac, Bella T'Seleie, and John T'Seleie.

Thousands of miles away from Fort Good Hope, in Montreal, there are similarly a number of people who have supported me throughout this project. I would like to thank my supervisor, Margaret Lock, for her critical readings and constructive suggestions, as well as her support and encouragement of my work. Colin Scott's close readings were especially helpful throughout the course of my programme, and his emotional support was invaluable while I continue to work through the difficulties of being a non-Native working in northern Native communities. I would also like to thank Allan Young for his continuous support and for his enthusiasm in this subject which facilitated engaging discussion. I owe a great amount of thanks to Rose Marie

Stano for her patience with my incessant questions and her ease at making all the bureaucratic brouhaha move quickly and smoothly. I would also like to thank Stella Ziccoli for her considerate and conscientious assistance with administrative matters "up the hill". And Nicola Wolters, with her administrative expertise, was always quick to rise in "emergencies"; her friendship and support an added reward.

I am grateful to a number of organizations for material support, including financial support in the form of research grants from the Northern Scientific Training Programme and the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research Social Sciences Sub-Committee; a research stipend from Aboriginal Government, Resources, Economy and Environment (AGREE); and the Hugh MacLennan Memorial Fellowship. I owe great thanks to the AGREE research team and to the Centre for Society, Technology and Development (STANDD) for office space, access to computers, printers, photocopier, phones, and faxes, which helped paperwork and this thesis -- to borrow a phrase from a friend -- "flow like a river".

Discussions with peers were engaging and inspirational, and I am greatly appreciative of their support; I would like especially to thank Regina Harrison and Audra Simpson in this regard. I am greatly indebted to Cathrine Degnen, who has been an extraordinary friend and an endless source of encouraging words. Her comments and insights, our discussions of "healing", and our countless "debriefings" were invaluable throughout the course of my programme. And thousands of miles away from Montreal, in Vancouver, I would like to extend thanks to my family for their consistent support of my seemingly perpetual life as a student. And in thanks to Peter Kulchyski, words can only touch on the depth of my gratitute for his unconditional love and understanding; for his continual support and encouragement; for always being willing to read the "latest" draft; for his astute insights and commentary, critiques and suggestions; for urging me further in a space of creativity and inspiration; and...for being so persistant.

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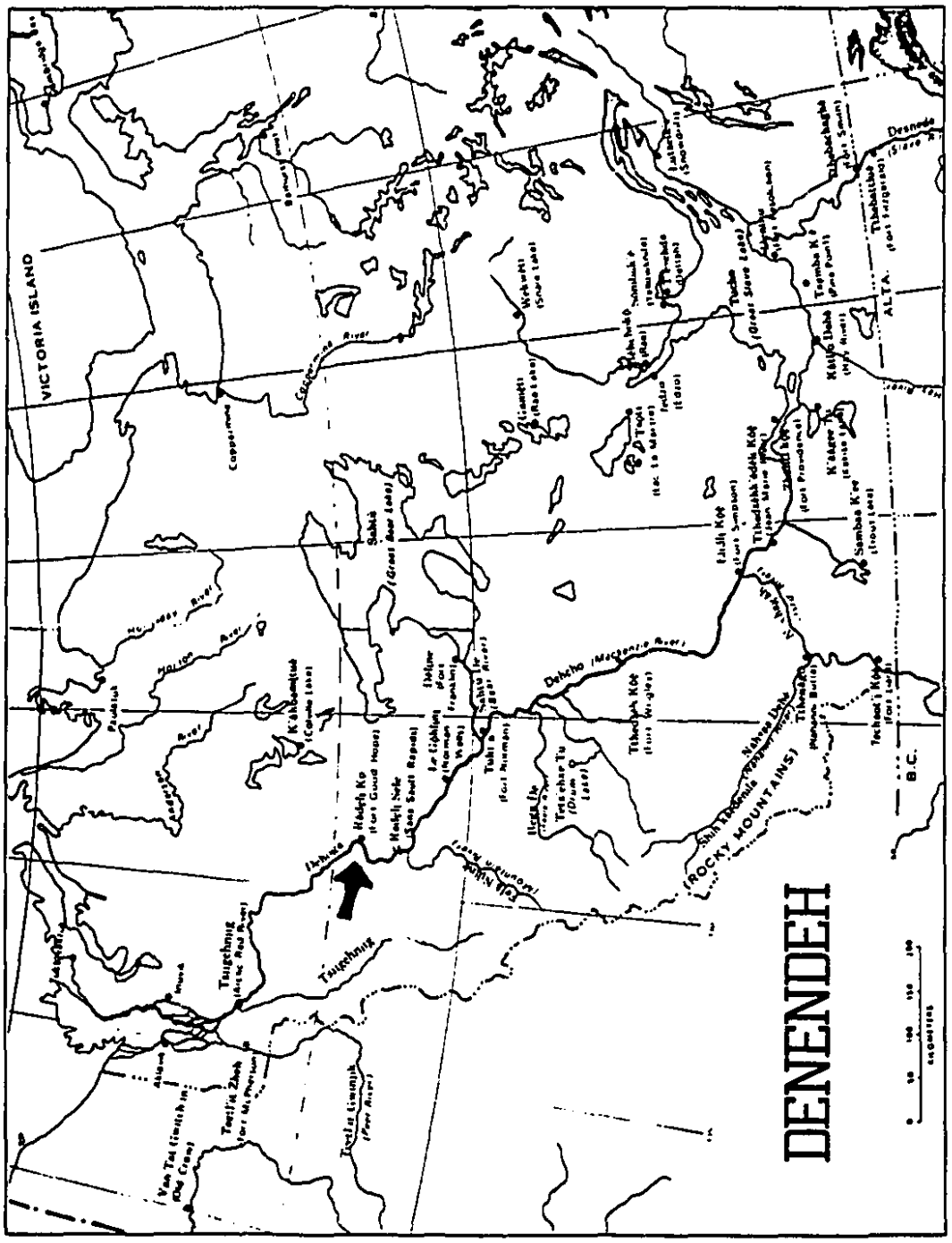

Source: Dene Cultural Institute 1989:5

I. SIMPLE FACTS

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's recent report on "health and social issues" begins with a paper by John D. O'Neil, a leading medical anthropologist working with Aboriginal communities. O'Neil's paper, entitled Aboriginal Health Policy for the Next Century, is an extensive and valuable contribution to discussions regarding the well-being of Aboriginal people in Canada. Notably, O'Neil points to the "simple fact that...[A]boriginal women are at the forefront of efforts to heal their families and communities" (1993:36). Simply put, but not so simple to discuss. Indeed, this "simple fact" of women playing a primary role in growing "healing movements" in Aboriginal communities has received little scholarly recognition, and even less discussion. This lack of attention to women, sadly, is not overly surprising, in light of the many historical accounts inadequately representing women. Furthermore, the association of women with social/health issues[1] has often been taken for granted as "expected", or even as "natural", and dismissed by patriarchal ideologies and policies as negligible and irrelevant. O'Neil, who has worked extensively among Inuit women, refers to plans later in this discussion paper to further discuss this "simple fact" of Aboriginal women's predominant roles in "healing". Unfortunately, the subject disappears from the text.

Indeed, it is not only issues of gender which are absent from discussion, but there has been little investigation of the notion of "healing" itself and its current context in Native communities[2]. "Healing", a complex and nuanced concept, is increasingly being used by Natives and non-Natives alike to describe Aboriginal people's attempts to address social/health problems in their lives and in communities. Among Dene, northern Athapaskan-speaking peoples of the western sub-arctic,

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[1] John O'Neil (1993) has followed Joan Feather (1991) in using the term "social health". The term was first developed by members of the Working Group on Health Conditions in Northern Saskatchewan to integrate a perspective of health drawn from family and community medicine, mental health, and Aboriginal ideas about holistic health and the medicine wheel (O'Neil 1993:45FN1). I have decided to use the conjunction social/health to emphasize this holistic approach, and to discourage the suggestion that there is a "social health" and a distinct and separate "physical health".

[2] One exception is the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's Report entitled The Path to Healing (1993), although there is little exploration of "healing" itself as a concept. See also O'Neil and Postl (1995).

"healing" occupies a predominant position in many of their lives, and is gaining political and social prominence as Dene move toward self-determination. "Healing" directly affects all members of a community: women and men, elders and youth, parents and children; and a wide range of community members are involved in the process. However, it is primarily Dene women who are leading and directing efforts toward "healing" and this gendered focus can no longer be ignored. In order to understand, respect, and support Dene movements towards "healing", we must similarly acknowledge and attempt to understand the initiatives of Dene women and the implications of their prominent roles. Elizabeth Grosz has argued for the possibility of an intellectual endeavour with a set of perspectives based on women's specificities, experiences, and positions (rather than on those of men) (1994:xi). In this project, I value Grosz's assertion in accentuating the need to recognize and appreciate a position grounded in women's perspectives. In order to address gaps in the literature which fail to discuss both the primary role of women at the forefront of "healing" and the critical importance of "healing" itself in contemporary Aboriginal communities, I explore these issues directly in one specific northern Dene community. This thesis, then, is one attempt to discuss and understand the relationship of Dene women and "healing" in the community of Fort Good Hope, Northwest Territories.

storytelling

> The storyteller takes what [s]he tells from experience - [her] own or that reported by others. And [s]he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to [her] tale. (Benjamin 1968:87).

As I argue below, it is impossible to resolve the meaning of "healing" into a simplistic all-encompassing phrase. In this thesis, I am attempting to present one set of interpretations -- or images -- of "healing" in the community and its integral role in the lives of Dene in Fort Good Hope. As the storyteller, I offer, here, an account, a story, of "healing" as constructed from my understandings, my perceptions, and my experiences. Yet, although it is my voice and my narrative, I am guided by the experience "reported by others", through informal conversations, open-ended interviews and people's actions. In this manner, my writing is directed by the words

of people within the community, and I try to let certain sections of interviews speak for themselves. In addition, within this story, I am trying to both support the voices of community members while also emphasizing the *un-said* as well as the *said*[3]. That is, I attempt to integrate the opinions and concerns that were voiced with my own observations and experiences. At the same time, I believe it is critical to engage these community concerns in a dialogue with theoretical inquiry. In accentuating the relationship between history and theory, Dominick LaCapra, the renowned intellectual historian, insists on an "active, sustained, and critical interaction between theoretical reflection and historical investigation" (1994:xi). "Only through such interaction," he states, "can history and theory pose mutually provocative questions" (1994:xi). Undoubtedly, this perspective is similarly quintessential to anthropological inquiry (a discipline which is, of course, closely interlinked with history). Indeed, theory and praxis are not mutually exclusive, but rather are engaged in a continual negotiation in which theory aids in our comprehension of experience, as does experience guide our development of thought. One might consider these as tools that we may continually build upon and use, adapt, and transform to aid in our understanding. In this exploration of the concept of "healing" in the Dene community of Fort Good Hope, I believe that it is both advantageous and essential to focus on theoretical queries of resistance, identity, tradition, and gender relations as a basis for discussion. In addition, I benefit from Tsing's claim for feminist anthropologists to "position the cultural statements of their informants politically" (1993:119), and I attempt to engage questions and ideas in the community with academic writings.

In effect, I follow the role of the storyteller: this thesis is a story, a narrative, which I am shaping. By assembling segments of experiences, conversations, and perceptions in a certain manner, I selectively create this account. This has long been the expertise of the storyteller, as among Athapaskan groups: certain stories are chosen, created, adapted and told for a purpose. Julie Cruikshank, in Life Lived Like A Story, discusses the integral role of storytelling, particularly among women, in the

[3] Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing has argued that anthropologists often "emphasize the *said* rather than the *unsaid* of dominant community discourses" (1993:119 emphasis in original).

lives of Tutchone and Inland Tlingit, two Athapaskan groups neighbouring Dene. As she explains:

> Traditional Athapaskan narratives are powerful because they are constructions rooted in general social concerns, even though they are refracted through individual tellers by the time we hear them. Like all good stories, they contain multiple messages: they explore social contradictions women have faced, but they also dramatize a cultural ideal women recognize. (Cruikshank 1990:341)

My purpose here, in this story -- this thesis -- is to convey the significance of "healing" in the lives of some of the community members of Fort Good Hope. And I have chosen to tell this story in a manner which duly explores the principal role of Dene women in efforts to "heal" their families and communities. As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing suggests, "stories give shape to politics, political communities, and political actors" (1993:73). By way of this story, and by way of the stories that many people in the community of Fort Good Hope shared with me, this project will add to our comprehension as to why "healing" is an increasingly political concern. Engaging an analysis of Dene movements toward "healing" with discussions around resistance (to colonialism), identity, and tradition, we will better be able to comprehend why "healing" is so integral to Dene efforts towards self-government and self-determination, and why these movements themselves are similarly crucial to "healing". In addition, by closely regarding the initiatives of Dene women in "healing", we will build a greater understanding of dynamic shifts in gender and power relations in this, and potentially other, Dene communities.

montage

Storytelling cannot be perceived only as a one-sided exchange of information, but rather as an interpretative forum built on the creation of images, both by the storyteller and by the listener. One form of storytelling which emphasizes this open-ended style is that of "montage". I am borrowing here from Michael Taussig's (1987, 1992, 1993) interpretation of montage, who in turn was inspired by Walter Benjamin's interlinked concepts of "dialectical imagery" and "montage" as tools of analysis to explain the power of images and their role in the construction of meaning. Montage

forms by the juxtapositioning of images, or even fragments of images -- segments which on their own may seem interrupted, discontinuous and disorderly but that merge together in the manner of a collage, a mosaic that embodies a level of coherence. Different segments converge and diverge at points, striking images which lend themselves to the fluid construction of meaning. This form of storytelling, by its continual creation of sometimes disparate images, retains a certain open-endedness, a creative space for interpretation.

In this regard, the "story" of this thesis is analogous to "montage": a collage of images and experiences in Fort Good Hope, of thoughts and opinions of community members, and of discussions around issues of hegemony-resistance dialectics, identity, Dene ways, and the role of tradition. Questions regarding these themes are interwoven throughout this thesis; it is impossible to confine these entwined topics as distinct and separate from each other. Rather, these issues intersect at several points, intricately connected within this complex rubric of "healing", and converging through the discussion of Dene women as key actors in "healing" in Fort Good Hope.

By mobilizing an approach based on montage, I hope to escape the confinement of more limited analyses, such as those structured solely within a binary paradigm. As a result of the increasing self-reflexivity of post-modern and post-structuralist analyses, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the bias of the ethnographer/anthropologist/researcher and her methods. In addition to acknowledging one's subjectivity, we should, perhaps, remind ourselves of a need to critically regard the modality of our analyses by recognizing potential limitations, and attempting to search for more nuanced forms of inquiry.

The strategy of montage functions in a manner conducive to this open approach in a variety of ways. Perhaps the greatest benefit to this form of analysis is that it allows the author to communicate certain ideas, thoughts, and arguments, yet at the same time it leaves a wide space for open interpretation on the part of the reader. That is, the juxtapositioning of narratives, debates, and experiences facilitates the creation of images, images which in turn fuel the imagination of the reader. There is no master narrative to which the reader must adhere. Rather, she may draw from the

richness and complexity of images, which she herself works with the author to create. In so doing, there remains an openness to the project, in which one may gain as much from the disjunctures between segments as from the segments themselves. Ambiguities and uncertainties lend to the construction of meaning. Yet, this compilation of approaches, of perspectives, of images, amalgamates within this montage, creating an intricate network of disparate yet interconnected elements which together function to further our understanding.

The approach of montage, in some respects, may also be considered similar to Dene ways, especially that of storytelling. This montage is, as I have suggested, a narrative, yet also a compilation of narratives. Dene stories similarly operate by way of this creation of imagery, fostering a wide space for interpretation, and containing "multiple messages". One Dene woman related to me that when the Elders told stories, you listened, but you might not understand what they meant by the story or why they were telling you this story at the time; it was for you to work through on your own. In this regard, it was an open-ended space for the listener to contemplate, to build its interpretation, and to add to its meaning in a context that made sense to herself. Dene storytellers, while communicating certain ideas, are acutely aware of the value of encouraging an open-ended understanding.

Congruent to this perspective, I have chosen to relate this narrative in a style which is representative of montage, and I have not followed the traditional pattern of beginning and closing each chapter with a summary of what "I plan to show" and what "I have just shown". With this alternate structure, I hope to put into practice some of what I have learned from Dene storytellers. The narrative form generates a space for the listener, or the reader, to add to the creation of imagery, and to build on its interpretation. In this manner, this space of interpretation will encourage greater creativity in understanding this complex subject of "healing". With that said, I hope to communicate certain ideas and arguments, and in turn facilitate discussion of topics circling around issues of resistance, identity, tradition, and gender. In this space, then, I want to briefly raise some of the salient issues worth close consideration.

These concerns interweave throughout the body of the text, and I will return to them in a final discussion in the last section.

In critically regarding the modality of theoretical constructs, I am struck by potential limitations of schema based within binary paradigms, which seem particularly constricting when positioning "western" binary ideologies on "non-western" cultures as a means of understanding. One example of the potential difficulties with this latter approach is the relevance of the resistance-hegemony dialectic as a means of comprehending the lives and actions of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Undoubtedly, this binary paradigm describes some aspects of Aboriginal reality as Native peoples continue to express their opposition to, and resistance to, dominant government ideologies and practices. However, in positioning the actions, the lives, and indeed, the culture of Dene, solely as resistance to a dominant hegemonic Eurocanadian society, I believe there lies a great danger of perpetuating this colonial relationship. In this framework, Dene actions, Dene ways, Dene culture are denied credence in and of themselves: Dene cease to exist beyond the colonial space. Furthermore, in its concentration on the colonizer-colonized didactic, this dialectical analysis often leads to a disregard of issues of gender and gender relations.

Indeed, as will become apparent throughout this thesis, these limitations are particularly acute in the discussion of "healing", and the predominant position of women in "healing" initiatives among Dene in the Northwest Territories. Certainly, "healing", which is closely interlinked with assertions of Dene identity, may be, in one part, viewed in its opposition to the dominant society. However, "healing" is emerging as a vehicle for the affirmation and celebration of Dene identity, Dene tradition and "Dene ways" beyond the colonial space. Regarding tradition as a fluid, transformative notion encourages an analysis which highlights the politics of its representation. Tradition implies a localized point for power and knowledge (Tsing 1993:59), and due attention must be paid to what selective knowledge or experience becomes considered tradition, and who initates this assertion. Currently, some Dene women are mobilizing issues of tradition, and of "healing", as a vehicle to address social/health problems in their communities.

In accentuating this fundamental correlation of "tradition" as "healing", many Dene women in Fort Good Hope are focusing particularly on *-aet'secht* [4] -- practices associated with "becoming woman". Both Dene women and men in Fort Good Hope recognize this specific tradition as a crucial period of learning Dene ways and integral in the construction of a Dene woman's identity, and thus critical in the "healing" process. While not all Dene women can be viewed as one cohesive single-minded group, it is apparent that many Dene women in Fort Good Hope are coming together under the auspices of "healing" and of "tradition", in aims to address social/health problems in their lives and in their communities. Indeed, many Dene women, as bearers (selectors) of tradition, are drawing on the power of tradition, and a power of "healing", and making their voices heard, with significant implications for the dynamic political and gender relations in their communities.

In order to better contextualize these assertions, I would like now to travel to Fort Good Hope and discuss some of my perspectives and my reasons for being there.

fort good hope

Fort Good Hope (Rádeli Ko[5]) rests high on the banks of the Deh Cho[6], also known as the Mackenzie River. Twenty two kilometres south of the Arctic Circle, this community sits on a long narrow peninsula between Jackfish Creek and Hareskin River. This section of the Mackenzie Valley, part of the greater area of the western sub-arctic known to Dene as Denendeh[7], lies relatively close to the Northwest Territories and Yukon border. Dene, a word which translates as "people", have lived since "time immemorial" in Denendeh, "The Land of the People" (The Dene Nation 1984:7). This area is loosely speaking bordered by the Arctic Ocean to the north, the

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[4] pronounced AET-se-chie.

[5] Rádeli Ko is the name of the community in the regional dialect of North Slavey. However, most people, Dene and non-Dene currently refer to the community as Fort Good Hope, or sometimes as Good Hope.

[6] Deh Cho translates as "Big River".

[7] Denendeh is also possibly the name for the new western territory which will be created when the Northwest Territories divides in 1999. The eastern territory, which is primarily occupied by Inuit, is known as Nunavut.

Keewatin area inhabited mostly by Inuit to the east, extending westward over the Yukon border, and southward into Northern Alberta and British Columbia. Dene are considered part of the Athapaskan family, a linguistic grouping which extends farther west into Alaska, east to Hudson Bay, and far into the south-western United States (1984:7). Dene of the Northwest Territories are further subdivided into the K'ashot'ine (Hare), Denesotine (Chipewyan), Tlicho (Dogrib), Deh Gah Got'ine (Slavey), and Dinzii Zhuh (Gwich'in), in addition to the Shihta Got'ine (Mountain People), and the Sahtu Got'ine (Bearlake People) (1984:9-10).

Historically, Dene lived a nomadic gathering and hunting and fishing lifestyle. Dene moved across the land seasonally and wildlife provided the source of nourishment and clothing. Although Dene belonged to different groups, they shared common practices and traditions in addition to a shared spirituality, culture, mythology and legends, family traditions, laws, and forms of government and economics (The Dene Nation: 1984:11).

Fort Good Hope is one of five communities in a region known as the Sahtu[8]. Fort Good Hope, a mid-size community by N.W.T. standards, is home to about 800 people, although over sixty percent of those are under the age of 30 (GNWT 1995b:3-4). The majority of community members are Dene (76%), along with Inuvialuit (10%), Metis (7%) and non-Native (7%) peoples (GNWT 1995b:4).

Communities are spaced far apart throughout the North, and as soon as one leaves the community -- whether by boat, plane, truck, or foot -- one enters another realm -- a vast expanse of "bush": a mosaic of spruce trees, willows, aspen, smaller shrubs and berry bushes, and the habitat of a vast diversity of wildlife: moose, caribou, bears, marten, wolf, fox, mink, lynx, weasel, rabbits, ptarmigans, beaver, muskrats, birds, fish. Lakes and rivers carve trails throughout the landscape, though none match the magnitude of the Deh Cho.

The presence of the Deh Cho, which spans over three kilometres at some points, can be felt everywhere in Fort Good Hope. Respect for the power of the Deh Cho is reflected in the community's orientation: all buildings and fields focus on the

[8] The Sahtu ("Bear Lake") region is named after Great Bear Lake.

river -- a source of food, transportation, and life. Three kilometres south of the community the river narrows and is graced by steep golden banks, an area known as the "ramparts". During the summer, a time of extended light and warmth, many travel along the river from other communities by motor boat to reach Fort Good Hope. Indeed, at this time, access to the community is restricted to plane or boat. The only road into town materializes with the ice and snow in late November, when both the light and the temperature falls (to about minus fifty degrees celsius), and it is finally cold enough to freeze the miles of bog and swamp: a "winter road" forms which then proceeds literally to evaporate with the spring thaw.

With summer, the warm air of the Mackenzie Valley and the endless hours of the midnight sun encourage a short but fruitful growing season. Spruce and willows thrive as smaller shrubs and berries flourish between them. The bright fuchsia of fireweed blankets the ground, among tall grasses. The few kilometres of gravel road meandering throughout the town cut through these grassy regions. Walking from one end of town to another can easily be done in half an hour, winding one's way through these roads or the smaller pathways which criss-cross through the various styles of houses: log houses juxtaposed with the quick-build plywood "pre-fab[ricated]" versions which, due to their relatively inexpensive cost, are a popular government choice these days. Splashes of blue and orange covered teepees rest next to most houses. These teepees, used for smoking and drying meat and fish, are generally constructed with poles from tall spruce, spare pieces of wood salvaged from construction sites and the plywood crates containing goods that come every summer by barge. Their coverings of assorted plastic tarps create a bright melange of colours.

Aside from houses, larger buildings in the community include the Northern, the main store in town and centre for all consumer goods: food, clothing, tools and supplies, banking, and post office. Recently, smaller economic ventures have also developed including video rentals and ice cream vendors. Across from the Northern is the "Unemployment Bench", a local hangout for people to sit and chat, or just take a rest. The Drop-in centre, run by the territorial Alcohol and Drug Program, is also nearby, and a cup of fresh coffee and conversation is always to be found. Further

down the road at this end of town, rest the RCMP Station, the Nurse's Station, and the Roman Catholic Mission, all overlooking the river. The Church, named Our Lady of Good Hope, is renowned as a historic site. Completed in 1867, the building was initiated by Father Emile Petitot, a well-known priest and ethnologist in the Northwest. Back facing the other side of town, the road dips past the Hunters and Trappers Association building, and the Old Age Home, where Elders often gather on the porch overlooking the field, replete with smiles and stories. High on top of the next hill facing out over the ramparts, the central Community Complex stands near Chief T'selyhe School. This large complex is home to the K'asho Got'ine Chief and Community Council and staff, the Fort Good Hope radio station, as well as the site for most community events including council meetings, feasts, dances, and bingo. Bundles of seemingly perpetual energy, children are always dashing in and out of these buildings, as well as throughout town, their shouts of laughter ringing far.

Many of the buildings and houses in Fort Good Hope now have plumbing and sewage, and the respective blue and rust coloured trucks visit homes three times a week, either delivering water or collecting sewage. These amenities are becoming more common, and even in the past year, more than fifty percent of houses have services compared to roughly thirty-five percent the previous summer. Hunting and trapping still play a prominent role in the lives of community members, and many people are involved in both subsistence and wage economies. Those employed in the community primarily work with the Community Council, social services organizations, the school, nursing station, hotel and, during the summer months, an abundance of construction work and fire fighting commissions seasonal labour.

Frequently, northern Aboriginal communities are portrayed as repositories of despair. General stereotypes of Native communities in the north range from images of the harsh, unforgiving arctic climate to sketches of barren communities with pitiful social/health conditions. Media, statistical analyses, and social reports foster these negative and despondent images of widespread alcoholism and solvent abuse, high levels of suicide unmatched in the rest of the country, family violence fuelled by drug and alcohol abuse. Aboriginal communities in the north are depicted as pits of utter

despondency, and within these images, Aboriginal people are portrayed as either guilty agents who are unable to act as responsible citizens ("It's their fault. They should stop being so lazy and get a job.") or as passive, and helpless victims of colonial relations ("Those poor Natives. They are not civilized enough to help themselves"). These negative images of northern Aboriginal communities as weak and sick places contribute to visions of powerlessness, and may be used to justify government policies and ideologies rooted in paternalism and the perpetuation of dependency (O'Neil 1993:34).[9]

Without doubt, problems in Aboriginal communities are substantial and real. In Fort Good Hope, difficulties with high levels of unemployment (20%) and dependence on social assistance are aggravated by a shortage of housing (GNWTb:11). Many people in the community conveyed to me, as they have done in government sponsored workshops, their concerns regarding direct links between the "loss of cultural and traditional values" and the cycle of unemployment, welfare, and substance abuse (GNWT 1995b:5). My own research indicated that community members identified problems of social breakdown and a lack of communication between people, organizations, and families as critical issues facing the people of Fort Good Hope. Alcoholism and other addictions such as gambling are predominant concerns among a good number of community members, both for the direct health problems they cause as well as indirect consequences such as poor guidance and supervision of children. Several people identified crime as an increasing problem in Fort Good Hope, particularly among the youth.

I was most disturbed personally by the prevailing concern among many community members, mostly women, regarding wide-spread and frequent sexual and spousal abuse in the community. Many women, children, and men suffer from family violence, and it appeared common knowledge that the majority of women in the community had, at some time, experienced sexual and/or spousal abuse. During my

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[9] O'Neil further points out that some external agencies and academics may interpret data in a manner that creates an image of depression or despondency in order to support lobbying efforts for resources for community development (1993:34). However, this image may be internalized by Aboriginal communities and thus reinforce relationships of dependency (1993:34).

stay in Fort Good Hope, several women with whom I spoke placed this concern as a top priority that the community as a whole should immediately address.

A great number of community members explicitly noted direct links between some of these problems and a perceived loss of Dene culture and identity. People described themselves to me as feeling trapped "between two worlds", uncomfortable and uncertain in either the "white way" or the "Dene way" (see also GNWTb:5). Many Dene have suggested that this loss of culture has been fostered by placement in residential schools: from the 1910's to the 1960's, many Dene children were transported to distant mission-run, and later government-run, schools. Some Dene describe this as growing up in a different culture, not having the opportunity to learn Dene ways, not being able to speak or learn their own language, and being constantly taught that Dene ways and beliefs were wrong and evil, particularly by the mission-run schools. Drastic changes in lifestyle in a relatively short period of time have contributed to breakdown in communication. Even within the same family, youth are often unable to speak with Elders as they might not be able to speak the same language.

Indeed, for many, life in Fort Good Hope is difficult; community members identify intense and pervasive pathologies which afflict their lives. At first glance, media and other depictions of communities seem accurate and comprehensive: northern Aboriginal communities, plagued with social problems, bleak and full of despair, and seemingly without a future. However, these portrayals are far from comprehensive and often lead to sweeping and misguided generalizations. Although each community may face similar difficulties and histories, they each have distinct conditions, and notably, different ways of addressing their particular issues of concern. In Fort Good Hope, many community members described the conditions as "getting better", "drastically improved compared to ten or even five years ago". Yet, within the media, and in social science, there has been little description of improvements in Aboriginal communities, nor of attempts to address these adverse

social/health conditions[10]. Native peoples in the north are not passive, powerless victims of unending bleak conditions. Clearly, Dene movements toward "healing" are emblematic of efforts to address some of the adverse conditions in their communities, problems which have a long history embedded within colonial relations.

In attempting to understand Dene movements toward self-determination, it is imperative to recognize and discuss Dene strategies of "healing". As the problems and concerns in Dene communities are themselves intricate and deeply interwoven with issues of social, economic, political and cultural situations, the concept of "healing" itself embodies a complex rubric of praxis and ideology deeply embedded in political, cultural, and gender relations. In exploring this enigmatic notion of "healing", then, attention must be paid to the cultural and political salience of this growing movement, and particularly to the primary role of Dene women in initiating and directing these efforts. In this context, the increasing vitality of this healing movement in Dene communities is leading to dynamic shifts in political and gender relations.

doing research in the north

When I first arrived in the western region of the Northwest Territories in the summer of 1994, one of my main interests was in examining the relations between "bio-medicine" and Native peoples. I was, however, immediately struck by the ubiquitous rhetoric surrounding "healing" and the gathering momentum of a vigorous healing movement sweeping across all of the communities that I visited that summer[11]. In Fort Good Hope, "healing" was pervasive in both personal and community agendas, and women appeared to be especially involved. This topic was not only of concern to "outside researchers" such as myself. Community members were engaged and vocal about "healing" and expressed interest in developing their

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[10] The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1993) is clearly an exception. See also Young and Smith (1992) for a review of academic literature regarding Native peoples involvement in community health in Canada.

[11] In addition to Fort Good Hope, I was fortunate to travel to Fort Simpson, Colville Lake, Kakisa, Hay River, Jean Marie River, and Yellowknife during the summer of 1994.

knowledge and understanding of the subject. In addition, several people had established "healing" as a priority in the community's agenda: some community members, most of whom were women, had gathered together to form a group who called themselves "The New Vision For Fort Good Hope," with healing as its mandate. As I left the community, my questioning of "healing" was only heightened as I continued to witness its increasingly vital role in other Dene communities in the Northwest Territories.

The K'asho Got'ine[12] Community Council[13] of Fort Good Hope, who clearly accorded these critical concerns regarding healing a high priority, graciously welcomed me as a researcher in the community. However, as Rosemarie Kuptana of the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada has noted, aboriginal communities are tired of being "studied to death" by "the 'igists' -- sociologists, biologists, anthropologists...." (Kuptana 1995; cf Nahanni 1977). Research is no longer conducted in Northern communities as it once was twenty, ten, or even five years ago[14]. The power balance has shifted from control by the outside researcher (or funding agency) towards one of a more equitable partnership. Communities have been working with the Science Institute of the Northwest Territories and with academics to develop stricter guidelines in order to ensure benefits and certain levels of control for the community (Masuzumi 1995, personal communication). In this regard, a formalized research agreement was developed between myself and the community to quickly establish both

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[12] *K'asho Got'ine* is considered the traditional name for people who lived in this area, and translates as "Big Willow People". Several community members suggested to me that the reason they have been termed the "Hare Indians" by anthropologists, missionaries and others, is because of a mistranslation by those "newcomers" originally in the area, who confused ***K'asho Got'ine*** with ***Gasho Got'ine***, the latter of which translates as "Big Rabbit People". Savishinsky and Sue Hara have authored an account of the "Hare" in the Subarctic volume of the Handbook of North American Indians (1981). Interestingly, at the end of this anthropological description of the life of Hare Indians, they comment that the name Hare is not used as a self-designation (1981:324). Furthermore, they recognize the self-designation of *Kaso got'ine* and its translation as "Big Willow People". However, they refrain from discussing this fascinating discrepancy.

[13] The Community Council, the main governing body of the community, is a combination of the band and municipal councils, an amalgamated structure unique to Fort Good Hope.

[14] See O'Neil and Waldram (1989) for a valuable discussion of, in addition to concrete recommendations to improve anthropological contribution to applied Native health research in Canada.

guidelines and benefits to community members and to myself, and to ensure that the project was mutually advantageous to all those involved.

secrets

Still "in the south" preparing to go to Fort Good Hope, I was advised by a "well-meaning" anthropologist that my project was not a good idea as I would not be able to learn "their secrets"! My response was a mixture of confusion and distaste. What exactly was this person suggesting? The last thing on my mind was "raiding" people's ideas and discovering hidden secrets unknown to any outsider except for the privileged anthropologist. To me, these ideas stemmed from a colonial anthropology which I had hoped had faded from theory and practice. I soon discovered, however, that these thoughts were not only on the mind of this southern anthropologist. When I arrived in Fort Good Hope, a community which has had its share of "igists" doing "research", I was directly warned away by two Dene men in the community and told not to try and find out "their secrets". Here, I was perhaps even more surprised then I had been by the anthropologist's remarks in the south. At one level, it was obvious that people were angry and frustrated with not seeing or even hearing about the results of studies and research that had been previously carried out in the community. Many community members expressed to me their feelings that they give and give, and receive nothing in return. Yet on another level, a greater issue appeared to revolve around power in having knowledge, and of making sure it is not abused or used by the wrong people. Perhaps, for some Dene, guarding that knowledge is a crucial component of keeping their culture, and affirming their identity as Dene. I tried, then, to make it clear that I was not out to uncover any "secrets", but that I only wanted to hear what people felt comfortable to share with me, and only from those people who wanted to talk. Furthermore, my intention was that the results of the research would not remain confined to the thesis section of the library, but would be made available to the community. As part of our research agreement, I am also composing an additional report for the Community Council which further explicates the results and analysis of the project.

While I was in the community for ten weeks from early June to mid August, 1995, my methodology for this research project included semi-structured and unstructured open-ended interviews with consenting women and men in the community who spoke with me about their views on "healing" in an interview setting. Research questions were developed in consultation with the K'asho Got'ine Community Council. These interviews, however, are but one segment of my experience in the community, in conjunction with numerous conversations, participation in community events and healing workshops as well as general every-day life. I had countless conversations with many people in the community during my ten week stay, aiding in my understanding and appreciation both of the role of "healing" in Fort Good Hope and of daily life there. In this thesis, I am attempting to convey at least some of those perceptions. However, specific quotes which I include are excerpts from the formal open-ended interviews that I held with twenty-two community members. Fourteen of these interviews were tape-recorded, a choice I made available to the individual depending on whether she or he was comfortable with that format. In cases where the interview was not taped, my scribbled notetaking was patiently endured. The quotes that I refer to then, are either direct transcription from tapes, or direct words that I wrote in my notebook at the time of the interview. All interviews remain anonymous and the names cited are pseudonyms. It is for this reason that I have refrained from quoting interviews at length. In addition, I have chosen not to include personal life histories, which for some formed part of the interviews, or often were discussed in conversations. In these cases, simply replacing a person's name with a pseudonym will not conceal the person's identity. Most of the interviews were conducted in English as most, if not all, of the community under the age of fifty speak English. However, the interviews with Elders were conducted in North Slavey with the aid of a translator. In this case, the quotes which appear are not the exact transcription, but rather as they were conveyed to me through the words of the translator. Translators also understood the need for confidentiality.

some words about the past...

Before we can even begin to appreciate or understand the complexity of "healing" among Dene and its gendered focus, we must give some discussion to the historical context of Dene. It is impossible, in this short space, to write a comprehensive history of Dene, or even of what is now the community of Fort Good Hope. However, it is crucial to have some understanding of past events which have so critically affected the lives of Dene in order to better comprehend this contemporary context. In exploring some of the times and events which have particularly affected the development of the community of Fort Good Hope, it is similarly vital to discuss literature exploring Dene culture and past "Dene ways". Congruent to the rest of this narrative, then, I am trying to be led by voices of people in the community, or at least in this case, by Dene, and am including interpretations of Dene past from Dene sources (Blondin, Dene Cultural Institute, Dene Nation) in addition to anthropological (Asch, Brody, Ridington, Savishinsky, Sue Hara) and historical interpretations (Abel, Fumoleau). In particular, George Blondin, a respected elder from Deline (Fort Franklin), also a community in the Sahtu region, has recently published a written compilation of stories among the Sahtu Dene. When the World Was New (Blondin 1990) is a collection of stories and histories passed down from generation to generation of Dene storytellers. In this anthology, Blondin has brought together a wide spectrum of narratives ranging from the creation of the world, a time "when the world was new", to more recent times associated with the arrival of non-Dene to the region.

i. *when the world was new*

When the world was new was the beginning of time, a time when giant animals roamed the Earth, a time when human beings were just developing and many people were reincarnated from animals (Blondin 1990:5). The realms of the supernatural and natural were intricately woven together in Dene world view; a person's life was integrated in both the physical and spiritual worlds. This experience was founded on an interdependence between people and animals, one of respect and reciprocity. When the world was new, animals and people would interchange their

bodily forms (Blondin 1990:5; Ridington 1990) and Dene suggest that their close relationships with animals are based on this longstanding connection between humans and animals.

Dene lived a nomadic gathering and hunting and fishing lifestyle. Extended families grouped together as bands of bilaterally related kin and travelled across the land seasonally, seeking out the most abundant supply of food (Savishinsky and Sue Hara 1981:317). Large game such as caribou and moose, and smaller game such as hare and ptarmigan, were hunted and snared, providing the major source of food (1981:317). Trout, whitefish, inconnu, and other fish were major contributions to diet, particularly in the summer (1981:317). Berries were eaten in the summer and fall, while certain mosses and lichens were boiled to make beverages and medicines (1981:317; see also Dene Cultural Institute 1994). Moose, caribou, and fur-bearing animals were used for clothing and blankets. Savishinsky and Sue Hara stress the additional dependency of K'asho Got'ine on snowshoe hare for food and clothing (1981:317-18).[15]

Methods of transportation depended on the season: spruce, birchbark, and occasionally moose-hide canoes were used on lakes and rivers during the summer; foot and snowshoe were the main forms of transport during winter, though dogs became more popular in the early twentieth century (Savishinsky and Sue Hara 1981:318). Toboggans made of wood or caribou leg hides, usually dragged by women, were used to transport family possessions (1981:318).

Dene have historically been noted as placing a strong emphasis on sharing, a value manifest in several realms (Blondin 1990, Dene Nation 1984, Savishinsky and Sue Hara 1981:320). Children were easily adopted among families to ensure the needs of the young would be best met. Surplus food was shared and redistributed among the group. Seasonally, several small bands would group together for a reunion

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[15] Notably, this characteristic of K'asho Got'ine dependence on the snowshoe hare is central to the representation of pre-contact life in Savishinsky and Sue Hara's rendition of life among the "Hare", and among other anthropologists and historians (see Abel 1993). However, other Dene groups, such as the Slavey, also used hare skins for clothing and blankets (Asch 1981:340; Christian and Gardner 1977:74). The debate over the naming of "Hare" points to additional questions regarding the suggested predominant and unique dependency on snowshoe hare among K'asho Got'ine.

of feasting, ceremony, and dance. Drum dancing, Dene hand games, and storytelling were highlights of these assemblies which provided an occasion for groups to meet and retain ties with others (1981:321), activities which continue in present times.

ii. ***medicine power***

Dene moved easily between the physical and the spiritual worlds, communicating with animals and spirits therein. This contact with animals and spirits aided a person to "know something", and to know how to use this knowledge to survive (Ridington 1988b, 1990). This knowledge was not only for personal benefit, a consideration reflected in the ability of a person to use this "knowing something" to guide the group in Dene ways, such as in a hunt or in curing. This transformative knowledge has been represented by Dene through the concept of medicine power (Blondin 1990; Ridington 1990; Sharp 1988; Smith 1982). Medicine power was central to Dene understanding and its application is extensive in descriptions of hunting, illness, and social relations, to name but a few. As Blondin notes:

> When the world was new, the medicine we Dene possessed was very strong. Different types of medicine power touched almost everything: the world, space, everything you see -- animals, insects and so on. The aboriginal people used their medicine power to make laws and help the poor, to cure the sick, and generally to protect the people. (1990:i)

All people, female and male, had potential to receive medicine power through the Creator.[16] In acquiring medicine, children would receive a visit from their medicine animal in a vision or dreams (Ridington 1983:60, Blondin 1990; Dene Cultural Institute 1994[part two]:319-345). This animal would continue to be their spiritual guide, assisting them "to know something" and to apply this knowledge in the Dene world. The realm of dreams and visions held specific importance as the arena of contact between a person and her medicine animal. Dene believed this spiritual relationship was a very personal one, and that talking about their medicine or medicine animal openly would only diminish the person's power which emerged from this association (Ridington 1983:60, Blondin 1990:106).

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[16] It is interesting to note that anthropological interpretations concentrate only on men as having medicine (Sharp 1988, Smith 1982).

Some people in the group were recognized as having especially strong medicine, a particularly powerful relationship with their medicine animal, and exceptional skill at applying this knowledge (Ridington 1990, Savishinsky and Sue Hara 1981:319-20). These people, perceived as having powerful medicine, were often leaders of the groups and were looked to by others for guidance and understanding in Dene life. According to both Dene and non-Dene sources, these people with strong medicine would help direct the movements of these nomadic groups as they searched for food; they would often have displayed adept skills at curing the ill; and they might also have medicine wars with others who had strong medicine, conflicts which would take place in the spiritual world.[17]

iii. ***the arrival of the newcomers***

The history of Dene is one which involves colonialism. Previous to the arrival of the "white man" to the Sahtu region, Dene had indirect trade contacts with the "newcomers," who brought both new goods and new diseases to their people. The first "sighting" of a white man along the Deh Cho was in 1789, when Dene "spotted" Alexander Mackenzie[18]. Missionaries and traders followed him, and in 1804-5, the Northwest Company established a post in the vicinity of present day Fort Good Hope (Fumoleau 1975:320). The fort was finally established at its present day site in 1836 (Savishinsky and Sue Hara 1981:321). Dene were actively involved in the fur trade economy. Most people lived "on the land", and only came in to the community to trade goods at the post, or to meet with other Dene groups. The Catholic mission post, and subsequently the Church, Our Lady of Fort Good Hope, completed in 1867, were additional elements attracting Dene to the vicinity.

The north, to many "southerners", and particularly to the government, remained a vast barren wasteland, an area frozen for much of the year, and containing little in the way of resources. However, in 1920, oil was "discovered" around Tulit'a, or Fort Norman (approximately 250 kilometres south of Fort Good Hope on

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[17] Medicine fights were the subject of many stories. See Blondin (1990); Ridington (1968, 1990).

[18] An Elder man in Fort Good Hope once relayed to me the story of Tusi Ko and his "discovery" of Mackenzie. The Dene Cultural Institute (1989) has published a version of this story in "Mom! We've Been Discovered!".

the Mackenzie River), and the following summer the federal government travelled to the region to establish a treaty (numbered 11)[19] (Fumoleau 1975:322-3). Once this resource had been uncovered, there was an influx of newcomers to the area. In this time of the arrival of new people, medicine power remained strong and central to Dene world view (Blondin 1990:98).

A few years later, though, one event brought immediate and drastic changes: the epidemic of 1928. Perhaps the most talked about event among Dene that was associated with the arrival of the white people, this influenza epidemic killed about ten to fifteen percent of each village (Fumoleau 1975:335). Many of those who died were older people with medicine power (Blondin 1990)[20]. Still, Blondin suggests that medicine power did not simply "die out" with the people who passed away in the epidemic. Rather, the arrival of new ways and new laws altered the way medicine power was used; this time associated with the presence of the Europeans was a time when medicine power was weak (Blondin 1990).

These "new ways" and "new laws" emerged rapidly as the territorial administration was formed in 1921, although at a relatively remote location in Ottawa (The Dene Nation 1984:17); and a direct government presence materialized in Fort Good Hope with the arrival of the RCMP detachment in 1924 (Fumoleau 1975:335) and the opening of the Indian agency in 1930 (Fumoleau 1975:336). These new laws included regulations regarding hunting and trapping, as well as necessary schooling of children (The Dene Nation 1984:17). Most parents were obligated to send their children to mission run residential schools. There, children were deterred from speaking their own language, often by violent and abusive means, and forced to adhere to christian religious norms, dress, and life. They were often taught that their

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[19] There is much current debate over the signing of the treaties (Treaty 8 and Treaty 11) in the Northwest Territories, and their meaning. In the Mackenzie Valley, Dene argue that, at the time of its signing in 1921, Treaty 11 represented a sharing of the land and its resources, that is, a treaty of peace and friendship. Alternatively, the government views the written document as an extinguishment of Aboriginal title to the land. See Fumoleau (1975) for a comprehensive study of oral testimonies around the treaties. See also Abel (1993).

[20] Some Dene portray this epidemic as the consequences of a medicine fight among two Dene men who had extremely powerful medicine. See Blondin (1990:172-6).

culture was wrong and "evil". [Certainly, images sustained this perspective. On my first visit to Fort Good Hope, I visited the historic Our Lady of Good Hope Church. The walls of this relatively small wooden church are decorated with paintings produced by priests who had been in the area. One painting in particular caught my eye: in the continual battle of good against evil, creamy white-skinned angels were harshly banishing the weakened, shamed, and notably dark-skinned devil.] Children sometimes spent their whole childhood at these schools, while others only returned to their families, their communities and their culture during the summer months. Unable to learn from their parents and their grandparents, many Dene were no longer familiar with life "on the land", and have described feelings of being "ashamed of their culture" as a result of being placed in these residential schools.[21]

As the fur trade declined in the mid-forties, compounded with an increase in tuberculosis, many Dene moved away from living "on the land" and towards a permanent lifestyle at Fort Good Hope. Similarly, the arrival of a school, nursing station, and housing and community services (such as family allowance and social assistance) were all factors gradually attracting people to the settlement (Savishinsky and Sue Hara 1981:323).

Other "new laws" which arrived with the newcomers included the implementation of new political structures among Dene: "southern-style settlement or hamlet councils" were organized in each community, which some Dene perceived as harmful to traditional Dene political organization (The Dene Nation 1984:26-7). In response to continuing government and corporate stress, in October, 1969, Native peoples across the North united to form the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories (IBNWT) (1984:23) which later became known as the Dene Nation. This organization aimed to give voice to the Native peoples of the NWT (1984:24-5); Dene have continually proclaimed the strength of Dene culture, alongside their opposition to government control over Denendeh.

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[21] Currently, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is conducting an investigation of the operations and impacts of Aboriginal residential schools. A report will be published in the near future.

Two events are particularly noteworthy involving vocal opposition of Dene in regards to the importance of the land, and the strength of Dene culture. In effort to establish a legal declaration that Dene had Aboriginal rights to all of Denendeh, Dene chiefs filed a "caveat" in the Territorial Land Titles Office in March, 1973 (The Dene Nation 1984:26; Abel 1993:251). Mr Justice William G. Morrow of the Supreme Court of the Northwest Territories travelled to several communities to hear testimony from older people regarding the treaties, and declared that the "indigenous people" were the owners of the land covered by the caveat, and that "they have what is known as |A|boriginal rights...." (The Dene Nation 1984:26). The government appealed this decision, and ultimately the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against the Dene on the technicality that caveats cannot be filed against unpatented crown lands (Abel 1993:251). However, this decision did not challenge the existence of Dene Aboriginal rights as defined by Justice W. Morrow in September, 1973 (The Dene Nation 1984:140).

Soon afterwards, Mr Justice Thomas Berger conducted an inquiry into the impacts of a proposed pipeline along the Mackenzie Valley in the mid-seventies. Berger travelled to twenty-six communities in the north, and for more than twenty-one months, he listened to over 1,000 testimonies in which many Dene passionately expressed their criticisms and protests, emphasizing the importance of the land to their lives in the past, at the present, and in the future. Frank T'Seleie, who was chief of Fort Good Hope at this time, was one of those who presented his views:

> We know that our grandchildren will speak a language that is their heritage, that has been passed on from before time. We know they will share their wealth and not hoard it or keep it to themselves. We know they will look after their old people and respect them for their wisdom. We know they will look after this land and protect it and that five hundred years from now someone with skin my colour and moccasins on his feet will climb up the Ramparts and rest and look over the river and feel that he too has a place in the universe; and he will thank the same spirits that I think, that his ancestors have looked after his land well, and he will be proud to be a Dene.
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> It is for this unborn child, Mr. Berger, that my nation will stop the pipeline. It is so that this unborn child can know the freedom of this land that I am willing to lay down my life. (T'Seleie 1977:17)

T'Seleie's ardent sentiments of the historical strength of Dene culture illustrate convictions of cultural persistence in the face of colonialism. As a result of these hearings, Justice Berger recommended in his 1977 report that the pipeline be postponed for ten years to allow for Native land claims to be settled (The Dene Nation 1984:33). He further declared that a Mackenzie Valley Pipeline would bring limited economic benefits, and devastating social impacts (1984:33). These events, for Aboriginal peoples in this region, were victories in their continual struggle with colonial forces.[22]

Meanwhile in July, 1975, the Dene Nation, at their annual assembly at Liidli Koe (Fort Simpson) further expressed their right to self-determination as a distinct people and a nation by way of the Dene Declaration (The Dene Nation 1984:28-9). Negotiations with the federal government over land claims continued and in 1988, an Agreement in Principle was proposed in which Dene extinguished their Aboriginal title in exchange for close to 500 million dollars and fee simple title to a small percentage of their traditional territory. The AIP was never signed, though, and with 1990 came the "dissolution" of the Dene Nation. Subsequently, the Gwich'in Dene in the Mackenzie Delta region settled a separate land claim in 1991, along the same principles of the AIP. And in 1993, Dene in Fort Good Hope agreed to, and signed, the Sahtu Comprehensive Land Claim, in which Dene and Metis of the Sahtu region extinguished their Aboriginal title and received seventy-five million dollars and fee simple title to approximately twelve percent of the Sahtu territory. Many people in the Sahtu region have mixed reactions to the signing of the Land Claim.

Transformations in this region have been rapid and dynamic, and this brief historical overview provides merely a glimpse of the enormity of life and cultural change among Dene in Fort Good Hope. Relatively few community members go "out on the land" for extended periods of time, though many make short trips from the community. Snowmobiles are much more common than dog teams, as often they are viewed as faster and easier; drumming and hand-games are popular among some

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[22] Subsequently, however, in 1983 to 1985, a large part of the pipeline was constructed, though not of the same magnitude of the original project.

although television and videos are attractive past-times for many; diet has drastically altered as most people shop at the Northern for processed and packaged foods, partially replacing "Dene food" (moose, caribou, geese, fish); and for many Dene, language is a critical issue as English appears to increasingly displace Slavey. Alcohol, especially, has had devastating effects on the lives of individuals and families. Many Dene in Fort Good Hope place a majority of the blame for these changes, and the problems which have resulted, on forces of colonialism and continuing discriminatory government policies. However, several people stressed to me that life in the community was turning around and starting to change for the better. Many Dene in Fort Good Hope view themselves, following the signing of the Land Claim, as entering a new period, one which celebrates Dene culture and tradition, and the vitality of Dene ways, one in which "healing" plays a fundamental role.

II. THE POLITICS OF HEALING

> *There is this woman, too -- an Elder. She says her medicine power... where she is at...is right at the tip, right down at the very very point of a knife....and no one can touch her there....especially her husband...he doesn't know where she is at... and no one can touch her.* (Sarah)

healing as resistance?

Theories of resistance have, in recent years, taken on a new prominence in analyses of power relations: social scientists have emphasized a need to acknowledge the historical agency of sub-ordinate groups in opposition to a dominant power. In this regard, some approaches encourage analyses to acknowledge less obvious forms of resistance, and suggest that acts of opposition entail a range of overt and subtle practices (see for example Comaroff 1985; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1992; J.C. Scott 1985, 1990). Theories of resistance are directly related to theories of power. Michel Foucault, whose exemplary works on power are world-renowned, argues that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (1980:93). Similarly, Foucault asserts, resistance is ubiquitous; it is at a multiplicity of sites of resistance that power relationships are negotiated. Resistance, then, is a fundamental condition to the operations of power (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:147): it is through these varying and mobile points that power is negotiated, shifted, refocused, and continually in flux. Resistance may be viewed as an element of the functioning of power, while similarly a source of its turmoil (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:147). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's noted works on hegemony, Raymond Williams (1977:113) has comparably suggested that the process of hegemony must be considered in conjunction with those processes which counter or are alternative to the hegemonic process itself. Williams argues that hegemony, as a highly complex process, "has continually to be renewed, recreated, defended, and modified"; "it is also continually resisted, limited, altered, challenged by pressures not at all its own" (1977:112). Analyses must consider counter- and alternative hegemonic processes not only as operations in themselves, but also as systems effecting and reformulating the hegemonic process itself (1977:113).

In his discussion of alternative hegemony, Gramsci emphasizes the practical connection of a diverse array of forms of struggle, including those which might not readily be identifiable as "political" or "economic", which develop complex relations of opposition to the hegemonic process (Williams 1977:110-1). James C. Scott, in Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (1990), has suggested the prospect of two "worlds" of resistance in which openly declared forms of resistance, what he terms "public resistance", attract the most attention. He argues, however, that there are equally significant but disguised, low-profile, undeclared forms of resistance, in the domain of "infrapolitics" (J.C. Scott 1990:198). In contrast to forms of publicly declared resistance, infrapolitics include the "hidden transcript", representing a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant (1990:xii), in addition to "everyday forms of resistance" and folk and myth ideologies which counter domination (1990:198). Infrapolitics act as the "silent partner" of public resistance (1990:199). Scott markedly distinguishes ideological from material forms of resistance and suggests that the latter evolves from the former, or that "practical resistance" builds on the ideology of "veiled" symbolic opposition (1990:196-7).

Scott's wide-reaching work has proven valuable in its attempt to acknowledge enigmatic forms of resistance which may otherwise be ignored or dismissed in historical analyses of power relations, in spite of being potentially critical and effective strategies. As I will discuss in more detail below, in understanding the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, it remains crucial to recognize the complexity and diversity of sites of resistance against a dominant Eurocanadian society. However, Scott's analyses have received criticism and I would like, for a moment, to focus on Scott's portrayal of ideological forms as distinct from material forms of resistance. I follow Timothy Mitchell (1990) who has criticized Scott for recreating this binary dualism, suggesting that the material/ideological binary is in itself part of the product of the methods of domination. Mitchell suggests that the classification of materialist versus ideological, or behaviour versus consciousness, exhibits a mental/physical dualism which is a product of western assumptions about political agency, which it in turn seeks to reproduce (1990:559). Analyses of resistance and power are based on

the distinction between physical coercion and ideological persuasion rather than acknowledging that "power now works through novel methods of creating and recreating a world that seems reduced to this simple, two-dimensional reality" (1990:573). He further suggests that

> The distinction between particular practices and their structure or frame is problematic not simply because it may not be shared by non-western traditions but because...the apparent existence of such unphysical frameworks or structures is precisely the effect introduced by modern mechanisms of power and it is through this elusive yet powerful effect that modern systems of domination are maintained. (Mitchell 1990:561)

The creation of the "ideological", or "unphysical framework", as distinct and separate from the "material", or "practice", Mitchell suggests, works to sustain the power of the dominant.

Mitchell's argument, that the creation of this binary dualism works to the advantage of the dominant force, is, I propose, manifested in other applications of binary frameworks in analyses of non-western cultures, such as the hegemony-resistance paradigm. That is, in applying this binary system of hegemony-resistance as the critical paradigm in which all relations operate, we succeed in sustaining an unequal balance of power: the "colonizers" will always be positioned in domination over the weaker situated, resisting, "colonized". Certainly, it remains crucial to acknowledge and discuss strategies of resistance, as of power, in order to better comprehend the relations between sub-ordinate and dominant groups. Questions regarding the self-consciousness of these actions are certainly difficult, with no simple resolution of whether actions are "resistance", even though they may not have been carried out with this objective. While I am sympathethic to the perspective that actions may oppose dominant ideology and power without conscious intent, I recognize that this is ground on which one treads precariously. There lies a risk in applying this "western" paradigm of overclassifying actions as acts of protest, and in some cases leading to a romanticization of "resistance" (Abu-Lughod 1990). In efforts to give credence to the oppressed, all actions tend to become represented as "resistance", and in so doing there lies a dangerous potential of codifying all actions, symbols, and ideologies into the resistance framework. As I argue below, by

concentrating on the resistance-domination dyad, and in some cases only on this dialectic, there exists a danger of perpetuating a colonial relationship.

With that said, it nevertheless remains crucial to recognize Aboriginal strategies of resistance in Canada. Certainly, Native peoples have explicitly declared their opposition to dominant government ideologies and practices: recent events at Kahnesetake and ongoing Innu demonstrations against NATO low level flying are but two striking examples. In the mid 1970's, Dene opposition against the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline was similarly a pronounced form of resistance (cf Rushforth 1994). More recently, events at Ipperwash and Gustafsen Lake remind us of the continuing struggle involving physical conflicts between Native peoples and the state. However, not all forms of Aboriginal resistance are as explicit. Peter Kulchyski (1992) argues that in order to understand relations between Aboriginal peoples and a hegemonic Canadian society, it is imperative to examine both forces of the dominant and totalizing power, and Aboriginal strategies of resistance, which are diverse and varied, some less overt than others. Kulchyski specifically emphasizes the role of subversion as a powerful force of emancipation of Native peoples in Canada. Clearly, it is critical to investigate Aboriginal strategies as they attempt to challenge a history of subjugation and thereby move towards self-determination.

Undoubtedly, among Dene, "healing" connotes a strong affirmation of Dene identity and "tradition", and also addresses the oppression of colonial relations. Naomi Adelson (1992) has been among the few to examine these issues in Northern Canada, associating the Cree concept of *miyupimaatisiiu*, or "being alive well", with "being Cree", projected as resistance against non-Cree society[23]. Adelson argues that for the Cree of Whapmagoostui in Northern Quebec, resistance comprises conceptions and practices that consolidate a particular collective identity (1992:236-7). Cree of this community organize around this concept of "being alive well", using this notion to assert their identity and to voice their opposition to the perceived encroachment

[23] Cree is a term applied to a diversity of groups within the Algonquian language family, neighbouring Dene to the south and southeast. In some cases, Cree, especially those who live in Tthebachaghé (Fort Smith) and Katlo Dehé (Hay River), are considered members of the Dene Nation (The Dene Nation 1984:10).

upon themselves, their land, and their culture (1992:237). *Miyupimaatisiiu*, or "being alive well", "concentrates issues of identity around a particular set of cultural beliefs and practices" -- of "being Cree" (1992:237). Adelson's arguments lay a valuable groundwork for understanding how "healing" is interlinked with associations of identity among Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

"Healing" among Dene may be viewed, at least in part, as a vehicle for Dene affirmations of identity; "healing", for some, is synonymous to "being Dene". This expression of identity may be viewed, again at least in part, as a form of opposition to non-Dene society. As Dene move toward efforts of self-determination, assertions of identity are voiced in opposition to, and as distinct from, a dominant Canadian society.

Certainly, this analysis is vital to recognizing the integral role of "healing" in combatting conditions of colonialism. Nevertheless, I argue that it is equally crucial to move beyond the limitations of the colonial dialectic. When social scientists perceive all actions, symbols, and thoughts of the oppressed only in opposition to a dominant hegemonic force, and thus under terms of resistance, we succeed in sustaining the very colonial relationship that is being opposed. The hegemonic-counterhegemonic relationship is presented as dominators to dominated, colonizers to colonized, repressors to repressed, powerful to weak. Even the ***language*** of this discourse credits agency to the ruling power: the colonizing subjects to the colonized objects.

Foucault has argued that "where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1980:95). He insists, though, that this does not suggest that forms of resistance are merely developed as the passive underside of domination, doomed to perpetual defeat (1980:96). Rather, Foucault asserts that resistances are inscribed in relations of power as an "irreducible opposite" (1990:96), yet distributed irregularly over time and space and at varying densities, involving different peoples or groups, and at different moments. While I agree with the multiplicity of forms of resistance, and of the value of recognizing how "healing" among Dene expresses opposition to a

dominant society, there equally lies a danger of overclassifying all Dene actions within this resistance-domination binary. Even a thinker as subtle as Foucault reinforces the problematics of this analysis, as illustrated by his suggestion that there is "never...a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1990:95). By regarding the powerful nature of Dene "healing" solely as a response to the oppressive Western society, though, there lies a danger of devaluing Dene and their culture of having any worth, legitimacy, or existence outside the colonial framework. The perpetuation of analyses based solely on the colonizer/colonized dialectic problematically denies credence for Dene culture, their lifeways, and their ideologies in and of themselves. Dene actions, including "healing", become represented simply as a response to the hegemonic power.

Several scholars have promoted this notion that all culture is produced and reproduced in a dialogue between the colonizer and the colonized. Nicholas Dirks, in his discussion of the relationship between colonialism and culture, has asserted that as "colonialism can be seen as a cultural formation, so also culture is a colonial formation" (1992:3). I would further argue that Michael Taussig's (1987, 1993) views sustain the perspective that culture is only created in the colonial mirror. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing (1993:16) calls our attention to a recent article of Henry Louis Gates Jr., entitled Critical Fanonism, in which he has recently criticized two post-colonial theorists on this point: Homi Bhaba and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak[24]. Although Bhaba's work emphasizes the limits of colonial authority (Tsing 1993:16), Gates suggests that, according to Bhaba, the colonized can mimic, but not remake culture. Gates further draws on the parallel of Jacques Derrida's "there is nothing outside the text" with "there is nothing outside [the discourse of] colonialism" (Gates 1991:466) to critique the bounded nature of the colonial dialectic. In this context, Gates claims that "Spivak's argument, put in its strongest form, entails the corollary that all discourse is colonial discourse" (1991:466). Gate's criticisms are valuable in highlighting the need to escape the confines of a colonialcentric perspective.

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[24] I am grateful to Margaret Lock for referring me to this discussion.

My efforts, here, are not to devalue the importance of recognizing Aboriginal strategies of resistance. Indeed, I argue that "healing", in part, plays a critical role in Dene struggles as an oppressed group moving toward self-determination. What I want to emphasize, though, is the need to move beyond this representation, to a more complex and nuanced understanding of Dene "healing". Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has argued that most postcolonial claims merely reproduce colonial concepts (1993:13) and that we must strive for a "postcoloniality in the space of difference, *on decolonized terrain*" (1993:77 emphasis in original). I would suggest that we endeavour to explore beyond the colonial mirror, to a realm *beyond the colonial space*. In regarding Dene movements of "healing", it is critical to retain a perspective which explores what Dene are attempting to achieve and express independent of the resistance paradigm.

During an interview one afternoon, Sarah and I were discussing "old Dene ways of healing". She related to me the powerful image of a Dene woman Elder who says "*her medicine power...where she is at...is right at the tip, right down at the very very point of a knife...and no one can touch her there...especially her husband....he doesn't know where she is at...and no one can touch her*". This complex image resonates with an intensity of words and emotions, a rich array of feelings and images. Knife; sharp; point; dangerous; hidden; powerful; safe; strong; precise; sanctuary; power; healing. This woman, with her medicine at the tip of a knife, gains power to be able to escape to a place, a moment, where she can be safe and secure from everyone and everything. This place, at the tip, the edge, the piercing point of a blade, acts as her sanctuary, while also her weapon. No one else can touch this very tip of the knife without being cut themselves. "*No one can touch her there....not even her husband*". Her medicine enables her to protect herself: the sharpness of the point, a weapon that allows her to fight back her own way, a minute space which gives her needed strength, a medicine based in Dene ways. And this place of sanctuary, this weapon, is also her tool: a knife -- a tool she uses throughout the day cutting meat and fish, working on hides, cutting brush for the tent, splitting a cord of rope. Years of learning guide this tool, and this tool itself is part of her knowledge

and understanding of living Dene ways. There is a power in having this knowledge, one which is unique to this Dene woman Elder. Her husband is without this knowledge, this power: *"he doesn't know where she is at"*; alternatively, for this woman Elder, this space of knowing acts as her tool, her weapon, her sanctuary, her power. This enigmatic image allows us to imagine a "healing" beyond the colonial space.

Perhaps one of the greatest constraints of analyses limited within the colonial resistance paradigm has been the neglect of the gendered implications of this healing movement. Though literature and discussions of "healing" are limited and diverse, I want to briefly refer to two influential analyses which consider a type of "healing" as resistance to illustrate this dilemma. Michael Taussig (1987) has argued that "healing" among Colombian Indians has embodied a means of resistance against the colonial power by assigning meanings to signs and symbols of the dominant order. In stressing the importance of Columbian Indians' subversion of Western concepts, Taussig particularly discusses ways that shamanism draws on the power of images of wildness and magic that colonists have historically attributed to the Indians. Although this is an engaging text replete with rich arguments and convictions, I was disappointed by the inadequate, if not non-existent, discussion of gender relations and a gendered significance in these ways of "healing". In a distinct and disparate study among the Tshidi in South Africa, Jean Comaroff (1985; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1991,1992) has explored how resistance to the neocolonial order is exhibited at the level of everyday practice. Comaroff particularly focuses on the "healing" of the individual self and the "tormented social body", practices associated with the Zionist movement which appropriates both colonial concepts and objectified Tshidi "tradition", synthesizing these symbols and practices in a manner which attempts to "reconstitute the divided self" (Comaroff 1985:12). Although Comaroff dutifully mentions both women and men in her study[25], she fails to address implications of gender relations in these movements toward "healing". These

[25] Examples include the symbolization of male-female space-time respectively in fields and houses (Comaroff 1985:55-7) and descriptions of Zionist "ritual sequence" in which "women are more susceptible to uncontrolled and uncoordinated possession" (1985:232).

representations, though valuable for their contributions to understanding some ways "healing" addresses colonial relations, simply ignore any gendered significance in "healing" and gender power relations. Restrained within this colonial dialectic, issues of gender are overlooked or dismissed. By contrast, in order to explore the relevance of "healing" among Dene in the Northwest Territories, we must pay due attention to the gender implications of this healing movement. What is the gendered significance of the prominent role of Dene women in "healing" themselves, their families and their communities? How are Dene women's actions under the auspices of "healing" relevant outside of the colonial dialectic? What influences do these have on gender and power relations within the community?

It is imperative, here, in recognizing actions of insurgents, that social scientists do not simply impose western binary frameworks as determinants and consequences of people's actions. I argue that it remains crucial to recognize the ways that "healing" is acting as opposition to and addressing the "wounds" of colonialism. However, we must escape the boundaries imposed by this analysis and give credence to these actions beyond the limits of a hegemonic-counterhegemonic paradigm. There is a point beyond this resistance, one which involves the celebration and exhilaration of people, and the valuing of a culture or a movement in itself and for itself, one which does not perpetuate a colonial relationship by viewing people's actions and beliefs only in their relation to the dominant power. It is critical to transcend a politics of language that continues to uphold this colonial relationship as the "colonized" are kept in subordination even by the words and frameworks used. This is one way of exploring *beyond the colonial space*: in contrast to the images of hopelessness and despair described above, we may move toward a celebration of creation and invention, of vitality and empowerment, beyond the colonial domain. In so doing, a more nuanced understanding of Dene forms of "healing" will allow for a greater discussion of the gender dimensions involved. Moving past this colonial dialectic will facilitate a discussion of the importance of Dene women's involvement in "healing". Here, beyond the colonial space, Dene women are not only "resisting" colonial society and

unbalanced gender and power relations, but they are also creatively valuing and celebrating their lives and their culture.

the politics of language

In this context, we can now strive towards a more nuanced discussion of the complex notion of "healing" among Dene in the Northwest Territories, and particularly in Fort Good Hope. Indeed, the language itself warrants close reading as the ambiguity of the meanings of "healing" and "wellness" take on increasing significance, particularly as they become integrated into governmental discourses. A recently issued document (April 1995) by the GNWT Department of Health and Social Services[26], entitled "Working Together for Community Wellness: A Directions Document", proposed "a new vision for healthier communities in the Northwest Territories" (GNWT 1995a:iii) and aimed to provide a broad outlook for communities to engage in healing and wellness. A collaborative effort by four territorial government departments[27], this "directions document" attempted to address the distinct cultural needs of health services in Aboriginal communities, and in so doing sought input from community and organizational representatives throughout the Northwest Territories. In the initial pages of the document, the terms "healing" and "wellness", albeit undefined, are identified as "the language of change":

> The language of this paper may be unfamiliar, and may probably bother some people. Talking about "wellness" and "the healing journey" is not something that comes easily to everyone. In fact, this language makes some people very uncomfortable. Many are too embarrassed to use it publicly.
>
> However, this language is the ***language of change***. People who are involved in some of the most effective work with Aboriginal communities use this language. Others, whose work involves communities, ***need to get familiar and comfortable with it, because this is the language used to describe what works***. (GNWT 1995a:6 emphasis added).

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[26] The GNWT amalgamated the Departments of Health and Social Services in 1993.

[27] Departments of Health and Social Services; Justice and Intergovernmental Affairs; Education, Culture and Employment; and the NWT Housing Corporation.

"Healing", according to governmental policy (and on the advice of those involved in workshops), has a definitive function, though never a direct explicative meaning. "Healing" and "wellness" is "what works"; people talk about it and "get familiar and comfortable" with the language.[28] However, the document refrains from assigning the terms concrete specific meanings. In Fort Good Hope, some Dene retain their own ideas about the meaning of "healing", while others express uncertainty as to its placement in their lives. As one Dene Elder woman expressed to me,

> I do not know too much in that area [healing] except that today by you being here, and people talking in all those healing areas and so we are learning about healing today...I haven't been to a session where healing has happened. I wasn't exposed to it yet but hopefully if I am exposed to it I'll know what it means and then perhaps maybe I'll get some ideas as to what it is about and from there I can say what I feel about it. (Barbara)

For Barbara, "healing" is something that the government is talking about, that people involved in "healing" are talking about, and that researchers like myself are talking about. Yet, as many community members explained to me, these English terms have only recently arrived "in the north", approximately within the last five years. Despite their recent emergence, there is fluidity in the construction of the meaning of "healing" and wellness". Meaning, that is, does not exist in facts and values, but rather in the politics of their interpretation and representation (cf Taussig 1987). "Healing" and "wellness" do not hold one definitive meaning; rather, these terms are open to varied and diverse interpretations, even within one community such as Fort Good Hope. Although uncertainty revolves around the meanings of these terms, many Dene in Fort Good Hope hold explicit opinions of what "healing" and "wellness" mean, in addition to their importance in the community.

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[28] I would like to note, here, that in response to questions regarding the Slavey translation for "healing", I was informed that there was no direct translation. Rather, "healing" was understood as an English term. In conversations with Elders, sometimes the English term "healing" was used; on other occasions, questions were asked about ways of "being healthy" or "becoming healthy".

healing

In trying to understand "healing", it is useful to apply the concept of montage. "Healing" may be visualized as a collage of similar yet disparate ideas, images, and individual life histories. Among Dene in Fort Good Hope, there is no single common definition of "healing": community members have their own individual perception of its meaning and its function in the community, and often this is intricately interwoven with their personal experiences.[29] For some Dene, "healing" is based on talking, for others it is based in tradition. Several Dene directly link "healing" with alcoholism, and to go through "healing" is a reference to attending "treatment programmes" at addiction centres such as Poundmaker's Lodge in Edmonton. For others, "healing" goes beyond alcoholism to address many other social/health factors, including problems related to cultural loss due to residential schools[30] and other issues linked to sexual and spousal abuse. For many Dene in Fort Good Hope, "healing" is viewed as a deeply personal experience, and very individualized.

> [Healing means] healing yourself, making your past good. It's like you can't heal the community. You can't heal kids. You have to heal the person first. You have to heal the parents, they have to be willing....***Healing is like going back to when you were small and going slowly along and making all of the hurts good.*** (Sarah)
>
> Healing is to work at yourself to feel good about yourself. Healing is to ***deal with your past emotions***....(Sheila)
>
> Healing is very much an individual thing....(Susan)
>
> Healing starts with the individual. It's a personal choice. Inner healing takes a lot out of you; it's reaching down and finding what is hurt and working on it.....Healing is a process but ***you can reach peace, forgiveness, and get rid of the negativeness - the anger, the bitterness, hurt, the depression***....I'm really excited about the community. Healing has already started here. Just from talking to people you can tell, you can see it in the way they walk, they aren't shrinking down from the hate and negativeness anymore. (Nancy)

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[29] Anthropologists who have worked with sub-arctic peoples, including Dene, have frequently represented Dene as "individualist" and repeatedly emphasized the importance of personal experience, including dreaming, in the construction of identity. See, for example, Brody (1981); Christian and Gardner (1977); Feit (1986); Guédon (1993); Nelson (1983); Ridington (1988a;1990)

[30] Sometimes termed as the "residential school syndrome".

As these above quotes illustrate, embodied within "healing", there is a sense of "reaching back to the past" and removing the "negativeness". This negativeness is wide-ranging, but for many, includes the pain and suffering of family violence, residential schools, sexual, physical and emotional abuse. Notably, though, the past is not only considered in negative terms. Indeed, it appears as if there seems to be notions of two distinct pasts: one of the more recent past associated with the arrival of Europeans and the drastic lifestyle changes which accompanied this event; and the other of a farther reaching past, a time when Dene ways were strong. This latter notion holds an alternative connotation, one based in the pride of Dene ways, as a site of strength and identity, of "healing".

> Yeah, healing is like that, healing is like a person waking up. I used to do drugs and drink for a long time like five or six years like that. All that time, I never used to socialize. I was afraid about what people might be saying about me, that people were always talking bad about me. And when I stopped drinking it was like I woke up. I began to teach myself about my life, my culture, about me - about Tina. ***It's about waking up and discovering who I am, and who we are as Native people***. (Tina)

> I think healing to me means recovery. You listen to the Elders when they say, you know, some of us take years and years ***to come back to who we are, you know, our identity.*** And they say, some people say, depending on how they are as human beings, they can recover very quickly....And I think today, you know, a lot of times we think, "No it's impossible." But you have to see North American First Nations people, you know, who...campaign across the countries to reclaim who we are as peoples. You know, it's not only Fort Good Hope that has that process. It's the whole of the country that has that process. (Karen)

> Oh, it was better [in the old days] because we all had our language, you know what I mean, that identity, our roots...as First Nations people....There's quite a few of us who still speak [our language] but it's not being picked up by the younger generation. ...but I know who I am. I know my roots. (Karen)

As Karen indicates, there is a nation-wide movement, or collection of movements, of Native American peoples affirming and "reclaiming" their identities. This direct correlation between identity and healing is indisputable for some, and an affirmation of Dene identity is viewed as a direct goal of the healing process, a point

to which I will return in more detail in the following section. However, as suggested in the ambiguity and wide-ranging usage of "healing", although there is a similar goal, there is some disagreement about the method -- not only among different Native groups, and not only among Dene, but also among members of the community of Fort Good Hope. That is, there is no single unique vision of "healing" among community members and there are differing opinions about its importance and value for people in the community. Indeed, there is some dissension over the viability of the term. Some Dene in Fort Good Hope feel "healing" has taken on a negative connotation, one which seems to emerge from pressures to follow a certain way of healing, and which many envision as "outside ways", or as non-Dene.

> ***It's hard to define healing as everyone has a different idea about what it means.*** People go around saying that they're healed, that they have overcome drinking, but then you see that they are addicted to something else like gambling. And then they try and force themselves on you, and hurt other people. People get shied away from healing because they see the people that have been healed and who still have all of these problems and they don't want to be like them, they don't want to be healed. Healing is a process. One can never be healed. That would be like being perfect, and one is constantly working on oneself day to day...(Cynthia)
>
> What about those who haven't been to treatment or never had alcohol problems? Are they any less healed? (Carolyn)
>
> No one is ever healed. It's a struggle every day where you are constantly working on different things, working on relationships. I've been alcohol and drug free since I was a teenager, and I don't smoke or gamble, and I don't go and say I've been healed. It really hurts when there is only recognition for those who have been to programmes, especially when there are functions offered only to those who have been to programmes, and not those who have been sober all their life. People who are role models for their family and the community should be recognized too. ...***Maybe they shouldn't use the word "healing" when they get people together in the community. Or maybe this [project] will help take out some of the negative of healing.*** (Cynthia)

As illustrated by the above quotes, some community members hold negative perceptions of "healing", particularly when it's connected with one particular way, such as treatment programmes. It is ironic to imagine "healing", a term which

generally promotes harmony and unity, as being in this instance, similarly a point of disunity and dissension.

> Some people wanted to draw the line too rigidly you know like my way or your way....[and saying] there's only one way but it doesn't work for everyone. I don't, for myself, I don't appreciated being pushed this one way because it's someone else's idea. That's the only way it works. I don't think so and I don't like to be pushed that way. I don't feel comfortable in the AA programme. I don't fit there. I don't feel comfortable in church. I don't fit there. For myself, I know the land really healed a lot of people from the 70's....I think what should have happened too was something of our own that has to do with the land should have developed rather than us flying out to these treatment centres to other people's philosophy, to other people's ideas of what healing is and to other people's land. (Marie)

In a sense, one may perceive the meaning of "healing" as losing its fluidity and becoming restricted to one certain approach. Some viewed this definitive approach as the "right way", but others were not comfortable within this confining boundary. In order to escape some of the growing limitations on the indeterminate nature of "healing", some community members turned toward a seemingly more neutral, yet equally ambiguous term: "wellness".

wellness

As I was reading a letter that a community member had written, my eyes became transfixed to the bottom of the page. The ending salutation warranted more attention than usual, as three simple words were added to the usual ritual closures one generally finds: *Sincerely, in community wellness*. When I first arrived in Fort Good Hope in 1994, "healing" seemed omnipresent in the community. I was slightly surprised, however, on my return the following summer, to discover the increasingly prevalent use of "wellness". It appeared as though "wellness", for some, did not carry the heavy connotations of one particular way of "healing" such as those programmes associated with Alcoholics Anonymous, treatment centres, or the church.

> Well I don't think [wellness] is all in a package. It doesn't come in a package. I think it's a way of living and a way of thinking, what you feel about yourself and the way you think about things. I could add all kind of stuff into that question, like you know, "being well". Like, it

> has for me, it has spiritual connections with how well I feel depends on how well I treat other people, how well I treat my environment. It has a lot to do with respect. How well do I respect other people. I think a lot of times when we feel bad and we don't feel well, it's because of what we're doing and like, if I did something to go against a Dene spiritual law it would be pretty serious for me, and I'd feel bad about it for a long time. I wouldn't feel well. Same with the way I treat people. It's pretty rough sometimes, but I think we have to keep in mind some of what helped the Dene people exist, survive, you know was some basic rules of sharing and values. That was very important. (Marie)
>
> The only solution to wellness of the people would be really stern education in the traditional, the story traditional way of life -- that's a very holy way of life. (Charles)

For Marie and Charles, "wellness" reflects a way of life, one which is guided by Dene values, traditions, and spiritual beliefs. Dene ways were viewed by several as fundamental to living and surviving and many Dene assert that a life "on the land" is intrinsic to a Dene way of life, a point I will discuss further in the next section. Karen draws this comparison between "wellness" and being on the land:

> Wellness would mean, I guess, community spirit -- how we live in the community as neighbours and friends....***I guess wellness would mean who we are***....wellness would mean being able to do things as you want to, being able to go out on the land and being able to go there for a few months with the whole family and have the time spent to really focus and see yourselves, and how well you can live together as a family....(Karen)

To some extent, in Fort Good Hope, there appear to be two movements with differing methods yet similar goals. Some community members allied themselves with the "healing" side, while others, as some of the above quotes suggest, felt "healing" held certain negative connotations, and have more recently positioned themselves with the "wellness" faction. I want to stress, though, that not all people saw themselves as either being one or the other, nor was the community completely divided on this issue. Nevertheless, this growing "wellness rather than healing" movement illustrates two significant points. On one level, the preferred association with "wellness" manifests the consequences of attempting to capture a powerful multi-variant concept such as "healing" for one particular approach. Part of the value within this montage

of images termed "healing" was its indeterminate yet all-encompassing possibilities. "Healing" could be shaped to fit a person's specific needs and circumstances, a particularly valuable asset as healing is regarded as an individual process. "Healing", in a sense, was what a person wanted it to be in order to meet her individual needs (and I am reminded here of anthropologists' frequent assertions that a Dene's knowledge is built on her individual experience). Yet, for some Dene, "healing" was no longer appropriate when it became defined by a way with which they were not comfortable.

On another level, the "wellness" versus "healing" conflict elucidates the negative feelings that people directed towards the use of "healing", most of which appeared to be related to "outside" treatment programmes rather than attempts to achieve well-being from within the community itself. In efforts to escape the increasingly confining and concrete nature of the concept of "healing", some community members have transferred to a newer, less bounded term: "wellness".

I have pointed to shifts in discourse around the terms "healing" and "wellness" in order to illustrate some of the politics of language. In efforts of simplicity and clarity, though, I have chosen to focus on the notion of "healing", which of course is not completely distinct and separate from "wellness", and incorporates concerns and issues which are fundamental to both of these concepts. It is not a question of "healing" *or* "wellness", but rather wellness is part of healing, as healing is part of wellness. For the majority of the thesis, then, I will centre the discussion on the term "healing".

the power of medicine

I would like, for a moment, to return to the Dene concept of medicine power, and its central role to a Dene way of a life in the past (see Blondin 1990; Ridington 1968,1990; Sharp 1988; Smith 1982). Medicine power encompassed numerous and variable images and uses ranging from healing, to causing illness, to hunting, to defining one's self. A theme of "protecting the people" and "surviving the hardships of living" prevails throughout its applications; medicine power was integral

to a Dene way of living and surviving (Blondin 1990). This multiplicity of images is amalgamated under a montage of medicine power, a representative concept which some even described as a "Dene way of life" (Blondin 1990).

The power of medicine implicitly lies within its application. That is, in Blondin's interpretations, there appeared to be a specified time to use medicine power, and that implies use only when necessary. Medicine power must be respected and employed at times that it is most needed, and times that it was seen to "protect the people" (Blondin 1990:147). Blondin (1990) has described to us how medicine power is no longer as strong as it was when the world was new. Some people with powerful medicine died in the epidemic of 1928. And, according to Blondin, the drastic changes in Dene lifestyle and Dene ways which have come about with the arrival of the "white man" have weakened medicine power.

It is tempting, here, to consider "healing" and "medicine power" and contemplate some of the parallels of these enigmatic concepts. Images of medicine power "touching on everything" (Blondin 1990:i) are congruent to "healing meaning everything"[31]. Many Dene view "healing" as an integral part of bettering their lives and "surviving the hardships" of contemporary social/health pathologies. "Healing" also connotes an affirmation of identity as Dene people. Indeed, "healing" is seen by some Dene as a "way of life".

I certainly do not claim that "healing" is synonymous with medicine power, and generally the people I spoke with did not explicitly make this connection. However, as I mentioned earlier, I would like to point to the "unsaid" as well as the "said". In this regard, I allow myself the liberty of delving into the world of medicine power. The more I explore, the more these corollary terms suggest that some Dene have a history of talking about a certain type of "healing", one based within the already established language of medicine power, and one central to Dene ways. Indeed, it is not difficult to imagine the healing and wellness movements as

[31] On one occasion a Dene man summed up "healing" to me in two short sentences: "Healing doesn't mean one thing. Healing means everything."

two powerful medicines in conflict, much like the stories of medicine fights, though each working to better the lives of Dene in the community.

While speaking with Sarah in Fort Good Hope about "old ways of healing", some of the continuities of medicine power emerged: "Everyone has something," she told me, "but we haven't learned how to apply it. Me, I know I have something, but it's mine, it's private, it's my protection." This "something", or knowledge of medicine power which Robin Ridington refers to as "little bit know something" (1990), remains integral to many Dene's lives. Critical to the power of this knowledge is its application, by whom, and for what purpose. The multi-variance of medicine power has extended from past views associated with hunting caribou or curing sickness, to addressing contemporary issues. As the powerful image of the woman with the medicine at the tip of the knife elucidates, medicine power, for some Dene, has acquired new meanings to aid in their "protection". For this Elder woman, her medicine enables her to find a safe and secure place away from those who have the power to injure her, a place where she cannot be reached.

new meanings

Jean Comaroff, in Body of Power: Spirit of Resistance, has emphasized the manner that symbolic schemes mediate structure and practice (1985:260), and especially the way signs and sequences are repositioned to acquire new associations in addition to their conventional meanings. What additional associations has the language of "healing" and "wellness" acquired among Dene? How are these terms being used today to address the lives of Dene? Some scholars have explicitly emphasized the manners in which indigenous peoples have subverted "Western" or colonial concepts, rendering these notions with alternative meanings which may be, and are, used to augment struggles against the colonial power (cf Handler and Linnekin 1984; Henriksen 1993; Linnekin 1990; Kulchyski 1992; Taussig 1987, 1993). These arguments are critical in exploring the agency of Native peoples in movements toward self-determination, both in past and in present times. We may ask ourselves, then, are Dene subverting the concept of "healing"?

One reading of the events may portray Dene subversion of the "outside" concept of "healing", which only arrived in the community recently, by reassigning it additional meanings associated with Dene identity and Dene ways, and applying it in their struggles to achieve goals of self-determination in a colonial society. George Henriksen (1993:20) has suggested that First Nations have similarly subverted the English concepts of "self-determination", "self-government", and "aboriginality" and are using these concepts to their advantage in negotiations with the Canadian government. This critical argument of subversion is useful in understanding the importance of "healing" among Dene in Fort Good Hope. However, I would like to point to an additional and alternative perspective, one which refrains from attributing authority to a more powerful colonial society. Rather, this account, by highlighting the consistencies between medicine power and "healing", portrays agency of some Dene as *appropriating* the "outside" term of "healing" to describe Dene ideologies and Dene ways (cf Taussig 1993). According to this interpretation, some Dene have taken "healing" and integrated it with continuing Dene concepts of medicine power, and now of "healing". This may seem, perhaps, to be simply a minor detail over the choice of a word, of "appropriation" or "subversion". However, these alternative interpretations reflect the politics of language -- and the ways in which language is used to illustrate *chosen* concepts or ideologies. In exploring the lives of Dene, we can *choose* to position Dene actions and beliefs in a subordinate relation to a more powerful dominant society. Or conversely, through the language of analyses, we can *choose* to politically locate the actions and beliefs of Dene in a structurally more powerful position. Rather than simply resigning ourselves to the notion that "culture is a colonial formation", we can choose to position the praxis and ideology of Dene women outside this colonial space, and with an agency and creativity which escapes the relatively weaker position of colonized. As those with powerful medicine contest each other, so do those in wellness contest those in healing, not so dissimilar from those who see subversion where others see appropriation.

woman as nurturer?

Now familiarized with some of the complexity of the concept of "healing" in Fort Good Hope, we are in a better position to give close study to the significance of women as primary participants in this healing movement, and some of the political and social implications. Dene women are expressing the need to address the health and well-being of individuals and of the community itself, both in formal public arenas as well as informal daily conversations. The majority of "formal" political roles (such as band councils and territorial government), though, continue to be positions occupied by men. As "healing" gathers momentum as a primary political concern, these gender differences gain increasing significance with potential implications for gender power relations in the community.

At this point, I would like to emphasize that I am not suggesting that all Dene women are a unified like-minded collective, nor that Dene women in Fort Good Hope are a single and cohesive group. Many Dene women have differing views on the importance of healing, as their voices throughout this thesis illustrate. Nonetheless, it is apparent that it is a majority of women who are involved in initiating and directing movements towards "healing", and many Dene women in Fort Good Hope shared similar ideas with me in our conversations regarding their thoughts about "healing" and its critical role in affirming Dene identity and Dene tradition. Indeed, aspects of "healing" may even be considered a space where Dene women with differing views coalesce in aims of addressing social/health concerns in the community.

On my first trip to Good Hope in 1994, Gail, a Dene woman, relayed to me her frustrations at being one of the few women on the Sahtu Regional Board, the regional organization that was determining how the recent acquisition of land claims monies was going to be spent. According to Gail, the majority of men on the Board were only concerned with economic development, business, and "building things" and how they were going to make money. She felt that "healing" and social projects were not given enough priority, and that the minority of women present had to struggle to make their concerns heard. Unfortunately, she did not feel they had been very successful at that time.

Later that summer I was present at the Deh Cho First Nations Annual Assembly[32]. Each First Nation in this region sent both formal delegates and other interested parties to participate at this second annual Assembly in the community of Kakisa, N.W.T. During one of the sessions which focused on issues of language in Dene communities, there was silence for a moment. The silence was broken by a soft spoken Elder man, a delegate who had not spoken very much throughout the course of the meetings. At this point, though, he proceeded into a fairly lengthy speech about the social problems in his community, and the need to address these concerns. Although, "healing" had seemed to gather momentum during these meetings, and could even be called the theme of the assembly, his point was particularly noteworthy because of his concluding remark: he ended his speech with his reasons for choosing to say these words. It was, he explained, because his wife had told him to bring it up in front of the group!

It is certainly nothing new or overly remarkable that women are recognized as having special concern over health and well-being and other social issues. Woman as nurturer, as mother, as care-giver, are images that have often been used to establish the universal roles of women, and even as "natural". This association of women with social/health issues is often given little stature or importance in political arenas; in the north this is perhaps due to the limited number of women in "formal" politics, such as band councils and the territorial government. Phoebe Nahanni, a Dene woman from the Deh Cho region, has argued that Dene women proudly interpret their roles as "nurturing" (*ts'neh zheh*, "to nurture", or "tending to the growth of") and "providing" (*-k'ets'endi*, "to provide", or "caring for the needs of"). Nahanni argues that "nurturing" and "providing", analogous to "social reproduction" and "production" respectively, are vital and integral to the Dene's subsistence economy and concept of "work" (1992:5). Interestingly, Nahanni also suggests that "it is through the custom of 'seclusion' or female puberty rites that the teaching and learning of these

[32] The Deh Cho First Nations are the neighbouring Dene region, just to the south of the Sahtu region. This group have not settled a land claim.

responsibilities occurred" (1992:ii), a significant point which I will discuss in greater detail in a later section.[33]

This interlocking of women with social issues does not merely involve a dismissal of the topic. Notably, although in a completely separate context, Alison Drew, in a recent article entitled Female Consciousness and Feminism in Africa (1995), has discussed the implications of women and social/health issues in formal politics in Africa. She suggests that previously women had withdrawn from politics due to a marginalization by male-dominated states ignoring women's social needs (Drew 1995:1). Currently, however, Drew argues that female solidarity has developed around an ideology which celebrates and promotes the nurturing role of women. This solidarity has further strengthened through women's organizations and networks and through religions and customary practices (Drew 1995:3). In particular, Drew claims that female consciousness[34] which manifests women's awareness as producers and nurturers of life. has been a critical factor in the collective mobilization of women (Drew 1995:5).

Similarly, it is interesting to regard the Icelandic political party *Kvennalistinn*, known also as The Women's Alliance. In the Spring of 1988, *Kvennalistinn* took the lead in opinion polls among women and men (although this popularity did not last through the following elections) (Koester 1995:572). The declared objectives of *Kvennalistinn* were:

> to make women's perspectives, experience and culture a no less important policy making force in our society than that of men. The Women's Alliance want to nurture and develop that which is positive in women's outlook on the world and to harness it for the betterment of society as a whole. (*Kvennalistinn* in Koester 1995:572).

Kvennalistinn, which promoted a political position based in women's perspectives and experience, persuaded a large number of Icelanders of the power and validity of their approach. Albeit in disparate contexts, these examples illustrate how some women are

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[33] I read Nahanni's thesis on my return to Montreal after fieldwork in Fort Good Hope. I was both surprised to see similarities with regards to what women were saying about *-aet'sechí* (the practices associated with a woman's coming of age) and pleased to find literature supporting my observations.

[34] Drew is following Temma Kaplan's (1982; 1992:106-125) use of the term "female consciousness".

mobilizing perceived feminine ideals of nurturing and providing as a basis for increasing female solidarity in the political arena.

Returning our attention to northern Canada, it becomes apparent that "healing" and social/health issues are becoming increasingly salient political concerns. Consequently, the association of women with social/health issues and with "healing" has clear political implications. "Healing" -- "the language of change" -- is being viewed by many as integral to the Dene political project.

> We're talking about wellness, we're talking about self-government, we're talking about healing. That's what it's all about.....In order to start governing ourself, to start taking control of our own lives, we need to heal that hurt that we carried so long from our past. Without healing, self-government will not work the way people want it to work. (Sheila)

Community members, both women and men, are beginning to place "healing" high on the political agenda for the community's direction. However, this "language of change" is being guided by women. In consultation for the wellness directions report, the GNWT held two workshops to elicit ideas and support from communities and organizations. Women representatives who came to these meetings outnumbered men by two to one[35].

Concurrently, the demographics of "formal" politics in the Northwest Territories are dynamically shifting. Nellie Cournoyea, who was at the time of this study the Premier of the Northwest Territories, undertook, in her final year of office, the role of Minister responsible for the Department of Health and Social Services. At the local level, the nearby Dene community of Pedezeh Ko (Fort Wrigley) similarly held a band election. Of the new council elect, *all* Councillors are women, and the chief is male. Although I was not in Pedezeh Ko, it was relayed to me that the Councillors won support primarily for their commitment to addressing social concerns in the community.

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[35] Two Community Wellness workshops were held in June and November of 1994 (1995a:vii). At the first workshop in Yellowknife, twenty-two women and eleven men attended. At the second, in Rankin Inlet, there were forty women and twenty men.

During my stay in Fort Good Hope, the community held a biannual election to elect a new Community Chief and Council. Of the eleven Councillors elected, three were women. At their initial Council meeting, Councillors accepted their portfolios of the specific domain for which they would be responsible. The three women Councillors, along with one male Councillor, were assigned the "social portfolio". Though this allocation of the social portfolio to the women on Council does not seem surprising in light of the above discussion, of particular interest are the possible implications for gendered political and social roles in the community. David Koester, in his analysis of the Icelandic Women's party, has suggested that The Women's Alliance has gained support for its "distinctly feminine values and concepts" because of historic and cultural roots which promote images of the nation as a woman, and with associated concepts of mothering and moral upbringing (Koester 1995:575). Although he points to The Women's Alliance attempts to stress this nationalist ideology with symbolic female perspectives, he does not emphasize the significant point that *Kvennalistinn* members are consciously using this ideology to gather support for their agenda of social change. In Denendeh, some Dene women are politically highlighting notions of "healing" in conscious efforts to addressing social/health issues in communities, including those directly affecting women such as sexual and spousal abuse. Evidently, as manifest in the recent Fort Wrigley election, this position continues to gain support and has had considerable influence on shifting political roles in Dene communities. As "healing" becomes an increasingly predominant focus, and Dene women's participation in these initiatives gathers momentum, it will be interesting to further explore how gender and political relations continue to shift at the community level.

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To afford a glimpse of one dimension of "healing" on the community level, I would now like to journey with you down river to a "healing" camp at Deh Ho Sha.

III. DEH HO SHA

> *I think that what should have happened...was something of our own that has to do with the land should have been developed rather than us flying out to these treatment centres, to other people's philosophy, to other people's ideas of what healing is and to other people's land.* (Marie)

on the land

Motorboats piled high with tents, food, and supplies, topped off with numerous kids leaning over the sides bouncing up and down, abundant with energy, travelled down stream as the drivers maneuvered the current from one side to the other, confident of the safest, most efficient path. We were en route to a week long community-based healing workshop focusing on "building stronger families" which was taking place "on the land" about fifteen miles north of Fort Good Hope. Eventually, we reached Deh Ho Sha -- the site of the camp -- a sandy island in the midst of the Deh Cho, a flat terrain with a large beach fronting smaller shrubs and bushes, and blessed with an ample supply of driftwood.

Although some organizers felt frustrated in the discombobulation of the preparation and implementation of the workshop, people's energies were high as events unfolded, albeit more slowly than anticipated. The workshop was sponsored by the K'asho Got'ine Community Council, and directed by the Wellness Committee which includes members of the Community Council, social organizations, and the community family counsellor (a non-Native woman). The Workshop Committee planned to focus on strengthening family relationships, as concerns regarding breakdown in family communication apparently had been raised in a recent community workshop. The workshop at Deh Ho Sha was open to all families in Fort Good Hope, and full extended families were encouraged to participate. Primarily, participants were women (but there were a few men), who had come with their children, and several men had come to help set up camp. The Workshop Committee kindly invited me to participate in both the organization and implementation of the workshop.

As soon as we arrived at Deh Ho Sha, people began to work together helping cut posts and raise white canvas walltents -- large tents with floors lined with spruce

boughs and carpets which often house an extended family (and friends). The camp quickly took shape as pup tents arose in between the white canvas wall tents, and families gathered together around the fires they had built in their respectively claimed areas. Tea was soon boiling and welcomed by all as the children transferred some of their energy to the beach.

Preplanned scheduled sessions quickly slipped into an alternative notion of time, one which was no longer controlled by workshop organizers, but which fit into the rhythm of the land, and the rhythm of life accompanying it. With the warmth of the circling sun beating down, and the gentle breeze grazing the tents, people awoke and immediately fell into the lifestyle of being on the land: gathering wood and water, tending to the fire, preparing tea and bannock, checking nets for fish. This workshop camp was set up as a fish camp, similar to those where Dene families would set up camp for most of the summer, setting nets, and using their catch of "coneys" (inconnu), whitefish and jackfish to make "dry fish" in preparation of the long awaited winter (Sue Hara 1980:132). With increasing dependency on work and life in the community, there have been few camps in the past years around the Fort Good Hope area. Many people nostalgically relayed to me images of the Deh Cho lined for miles and miles with these camps as recently as twenty years ago. The memories people held of the integral importance that the land held to their lives in the past brought a range of emotions to their faces, to their voices, and to their words. For some, smiles softened their weathered faces as they related feelings of peace and happiness at living in camps, travelling over the land. For others, tears carried a sadness emanating from a sense of loss of all that has been associated with life on the land. And for others, a burst of pride and strength of Dene life on the land instilled a sense of their historic presence in Denendeh and their Aboriginal rights.

> From the time that the earth was made here, we've lived on it, we've enjoyed it....In every inch of this land you see, when you go inland you see all the campsites and all the places are all evidence in how we used this land and how we live on the land and it's still there. ***It hasn't been erased.*** It's still there, and it will always be there for that. (Barbara, Elder)

One may interpret in Barbara's voice, not only a love for the lifestyle of being on the land, but also an implicit critique against the changes in society which have shifted the focus of life on the land to a life based in the community. Barbara asserts the relationship that Dene have with the land, and their rights to live in Denendeh. For Barbara, nothing can erase the long Dene history on this land.

As the workshop progressed, the prefiguring structure of the workshop -- careful planning of times and events -- gradually collapsed into a cohesive structure of its own, a structure based on a very different way of life, a structure which finds its configuration in being "on the land". In some ways, operating the workshop camp as a "traditional" fish camp illustrates the affirmation of "tradition" as "healing", and the importance of "the land" therein. This emerging design of the workshop reflected strong community concern for "healing" to take place on the land, and with the land.

> Being on the land is integral to healing. There is no distractions, less structure, and we are closer to spirits....Out on the land, the guards are down, people become real. (Susan)

Susan's words reflect many Dene's perception of "being on the land" as an integral component to "healing"; indeed "the land" forms a major part of contemporary notions of Dene identity. One may ponder the reasons behind this affirmed connection, and the intensity of some Dene's vocal identity associated with the land. Some may suggest notions of Dene affinity to the land have strengthened with struggles over land rights which Dene have faced through treaty negotiations and land claims settlements with the Canadian government. Others may argue that these notions have only appeared to gather strength with the focus on Aboriginal rights and environmentalist movements. Perhaps, though, life on the land is viewed as a critical component to healing because of remembered "traditional" practices and beliefs interwoven with the land. It is certain, as Barbara's words above elucidate, that this association with the land is one which is entwined with both current and historical notions of Dene life, and of Dene identity.

> ***Out on the land you know you're Dene. You know what to do. It's within you.*** Respect comes out. You are Dene and you are in touch with the land. Everyone has a role, everyone knows what to do. (Cynthia)

Many people in Fort Good Hope voiced notions of time and space "in town" as distinct from concepts of time and space "on the land". As some community members remarked to me, being in town is analogous to living according to "white man's ways", to working to a ticking clock, to buying food at the Northern, to attending committee meetings at specified times, to making sure the children are at school between nine and three, and lunch ready at noon. A wage economy, material goods, schools, and houses are all factors contributing to the settlement of people in the community and following these notions of time. Some community members in Fort Good Hope explained to me that one difference between being "in town" and being "on the land" was that their lives were "*structured*" in town -- around their jobs, around the clock, around "western" ways. Alternatively, outside of the community, "on the land", they related different notions of time -- an "*unstructured*" pace of life. Work on the land involves tending the fire, checking the nets, making dry fish, tanning hides, but not adhering to a defined schedule, or perhaps more explicitly, not following a schedule dictated by someone else. Nahanni suggests that the colonial notions of time as linear and compartmentalized segments divided into minutes and hours, replaced the Dene understanding of time based on night and day, and seasonal changes (1990:175). Many Dene in Fort Good Hope advised me that the pace of being on the land was congruent with Dene ways: as Cynthia's words above emphasize, "Out on the land you know you're Dene. You know what to do. It's within you...."

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson have described "space" as "a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed" (1992:7). In addition, Gupta and Ferguson emphasize the need to focus on the way space is imagined (1992:11). Both of these concepts, I believe, can be transcoded to notions of time, or perhaps in the conjunction of a time-space structure. Clearly, many Dene demarcate cultural and social difference between life "on the land" and life "in town", an approach which in some ways easily follows Dene ways of inscribing Dene history and knowledge on the landscape. Rather than attributing the town as "structured" and the land as "unstructured", though, we might consider

the time-space of "the land" as constituting a different, alternative structure than that of the community. Inscribed on the landscape are narratives and stories relating Dene ways, beliefs and spiritual laws. Marie Francoise Guédon, an anthropologist who has worked among several Dene groups, explains that her "instructors did not seem to separate the stories from the landscape -- both were equally meaningful. None of them could talk about the Dene way without mentioning sooner or later the territory that supported it" (1994:47). (See also Blondin 1990; Cruikshank 1988,1994.) Certain norms and ways of doing things on the land are interwoven with Dene beliefs and social relations. Nahanni tells us:

> The ideology of the bush environment included a sense of place and family, stability through knowing the customs, egalitarianism, co-operation, controlling one's use of the resources, and self-sufficiency. The overall benefits included the continued replenishment of resources, stability, and predictability within the family, and knowledge by observing the physical and biological environment. (1990:174)

While we were at the workshop, a group of women, including myself, were sitting around a large circle of fish that had been caught in the net earlier. We were reaching from this large pile of fish lying on a bed of fresh willows, and cutting them into strips to smoke and dry. As the pile diminished, the circle became smaller and less defined, though there still remained a large amount of blood from the fish. At this point, an Elder woman warned me (through her daughter's translation) not to step across or over this circle or the fish blood; this was against Dene law. A woman has special power, which when used misappropriately as in stepping over certain things or spaces, may cause harm (see Cruikshank 1975,1979,1983,1990; Guédon 1994; Savishinsky 1974, Sue Hara 1980). For many Dene women, there *is* a structure to being on the land, one which is embodied within Dene ways and Dene law.

> Respecting wildlife, your environment is also very important. I believe strongly in having respect for wildlife, not stepping over blood, not stepping over bones and the hair of the animals, even feathers. Because those things cause a person to grow old fast and it invites sickness and illnesses. And you become weak really before your time. I believe that really strongly and I follow it to this day. (Anne, Elder)

Anne believes that following Dene laws is critical to maintaining one's health. Indeed, to breach these laws is to invite illness. "If I did something to go against a

Dene spiritual law, it would be pretty serious for me, and I'd feel bad about it for a long time. I wouldn't feel well" (Marie). Perhaps, then, this *structure* of Dene ways on the land is one factor which adds to the strong convictions of some Dene that being on the land and following Dene ways are fundamental to "healing".

at the workshop: questions of identity

The pre-set arrangement of initially registered enrolment for the workshop dissolved quickly into a more fluid group of participants who came for certain days (during the weekend), or who dropped by in the evening and participated in the session. Word of the camp spread quickly in Fort Good Hope, and visiting the workshop soon became a popular activity: many were intrigued by the camp, not to mention their mouths watering at the thought of fresh fish and hot bannock. It was apparent that the whole idea of this type of workshop was new to the community, and boat after boat arrived to appease their curiosity, yet in a manner which permitted people to take control over the form and extent of their participation.

This type of workshop "on the land", was new not only to participants, but also to the facilitators. Sandra, the first Traditional Health and Healing Consultant with the GNWT Department of Health and Social Services, was just settling into her recently developed position. As she announced to everyone, this was her first workshop of this kind "out on the land, without flipcharts and markers". Sandra, a Cree woman from south of Yellowknife, had a warm and affectionate personality and was well-liked and appreciated by the workshop participants.

As I mentioned above, the call of the elements quickly dictated the pace of the workshop. The intense burning heat of the sun in combination with the work of the camp altered the time of sessions which had initially been planned for the entire day, to cooler evening gatherings around the fire. The first evening meeting convened with calling people to the sound of music on the small portable cassette player that was brought to the event. No Dene drummers had been able to come to the camp and the portable remained the source of music. However, the music ringing through the air was not the sound of Dene drums but rather a tape recording of "powwow music"

from Ojibwa drummers "in the south". We danced in a circle around the fire, holding hands and facing into the centre. In typical Dene drum dances that I had participated in or watched, we had danced single file around the fire, front to back, our feet shuffling to the beat of the drum[36]. The beat and the voices of the powwow song constructed a completely different sound from anything I had heard in the north; our feet struggled to adapt to the alternative rhythm and movements. After a prayer and feeding of the fire, we proceeded to smudge ourselves with the flavourful burning of braided sweetgrass, a process which involves waving the sweet-smelling smoke over your face, head, and body as a form of cleansing.

To many Natives and non-Natives who have participated in some type of ceremony, particularly among eastern woodlands Aboriginal peoples, the trajectory described above exudes a familiarity and an understanding warmth. Those comfortable with these actions embrace their meanings of cleansing and prayer. What is noteworthy of these actions in these circumstances, is the place and the cultural context of this healing camp. Were these actions familiar to Dene at this camp? How did they interpret their significance? Were they comfortable with this approach? Were these practices perceived as being "traditional"? Were these ways now considered "Dene ways of healing"?

Certainly, these actions raised numerous questions regarding Dene's perceptions of ways of healing, and thus about the construction of Dene identity. In dialogue with community members, I found that one practice illustrating the differing views of the constitution of "traditional" Dene ways of healing is the current use of "sweats", or the sweatlodge.

Sweats, most often associated with Algonquian and Anishnabwe cultures, generally involve a cleansing ceremony -- of the body, mind, and soul -- through "teachings". Part of this ceremony includes entering a sweatlodge, a small enclosed structure constructed with canvas, carpets, skins and tarps. Participants sit around a centre of extremely hot rocks which, when water is poured over them, produce great

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[36] Michael Asch (1988), in Kinship and the Drum Dance in a Northern Dene Community, has written about the importance of Dene drumming to Dene culture. He worked in the community of Pedezeh Ko. See also Ridington (1978).

amounts of steam, causing people to sweat. The ceremony is filled with prayer, songs, and talking.[37] An increasing number of Aboriginal people throughout North America are participating in sweats.

Recently, sweats have been held in Fort Good Hope. There is dissension, though, over whether they should be present in the community. Some community members view it as integral to their healing process, and potentially beneficial to others in the community. Others feel that these are the ways of another culture, and they do not belong in the north. Some claim that traditionally, sweats were used among Dene but had been lost in colonial relations, and that they are simply "reviving traditions".[38]

When I asked some community members about these practices, many related to me their uneasiness at the idea of using another culture's ways, particularly because it did not (yet) hold meaning for them:

> [Other ways of healing like sweatlodges] really bother me. Why are people taking another culture's traditional way of healing? They are different people. We all have our own ways of seeing things, speaking, living. When you mix it together, more confusion sets in.....When I went south to Bonneville [an addiction centre near Toronto], they were doing some of these things like smudging, sweetgrass and I didn't want to participate -- you had the choice -- because it wasn't my culture. I didn't grow up with it....(Nancy)

> ...I feel it's really different for me and I kind of get embarrassed...and how can I go around liking someone else's stuff and not really understanding it or appreciating it. You can tell me but it's not me. (Margaret)

> I don't feel threatened by it [other ways of healing, sweat lodges]. Some people they feel threatened, especially some of the Elders. That's what the roman catholic church taught them. I don't know if I will use it. Maybe I will at some point if it takes on meaning for me. But right now it has no meaning. I don't understand why they use it and its importance, but if it took on a special meaning for me, then I would maybe use it. (Susan)

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[37] For a description of the sweat lodge see Swartz (1988:102); Waldram (1993:352).

[38] James Waldram (1993, 1994) has recently discussed the importance of sweats in Aboriginal healing in Canadian prisons. Interestingly, the Aboriginal offenders were of diverse cultural backgrounds, and sweats were not always associated with their culture. Similarly, the offenders he interviewed held diverse opinions as to the appropriateness of holding sweats under the instruction of Elders in the prisons.

I don't like it. It's like adopting somebody else's culture. (Tina)

I think that's culturally inappropriate for the north because that sweatlodges and like the sweetgrass burning, you know, like smudging is not part of the northern culture. I know that. I married down that way, I lived with it, I understand that's part of their culture. I just went in it and I accepted it for them, but then coming back. I don't bring that with me, because it's not part of here...and then some of these people that have gone to you know like Poundmaker's and the other place there, Bonneville. You know they go smudge over there, they've been into sweatlodges and that, and they try to bring it back here and it's not [appropriate here]. Because I think you really have to go back to the Elders and ask them what did they do... (Vicky)

I would like to stress, here, that in spite of the number of quotes expressing dissension of the use of sweats in Fort Good Hope, several community members have participated in the ceremony and celebrated its role in their "healing". Others were supportive of its presence in the community, but were more unsure of its purpose in their life, and how they might use it.

I liked it [smudging]. Smudging is good. I think it's important to learn other culture's ways, but sweat lodges, I'm not ready for that. I think I'd die in the heat! They've asked me to but I know I'm not ready. (Sarah)

I've asked somebody that's 60 something years old, and she said as a child she could remember Elders going into sweatlodges and having sweats around here. That's really ... like I've tried it about twice and it's really...it's new...I really don't know how to go about it. I don't know how to use it to my advantage. It's new. I think that if they're going to have more sweats I want to know -- how can I use it? (Carolyn)

Although many community members did not feel comfortable with these methods themselves, they distinctly voiced their respect for other Aboriginal customs and practices. There was strong admiration and appreciation for people practising their traditions and expressing certain cultural views.

I have a lot of respect for others' ways, a lot of interest. I am curious. I like to learn about other's ways. And I like to see them practising these traditions, these rituals. Here, a lot of that is lost, and it is good to see others practising their ways. (Marie)

I respect people for their beliefs, it's the one Creator up there that we believe in. And in any way we offer things to him, through smudging,

> through sweetgrass, through any kind of rituals that is good, that is not negative, then sure we have to respect one another. (Sheila)
>
> I think we always grew up with our Elders and even the stories I heard when I was young that other people had their own rituals or their own systems or their own traditions in terms of how they practice peace, peacemaking between different nations. Even today you still hear how they tell stories about the Dogrib, the Loucheux [Gwich'in] and how ***all of them have their own structure of who they were as people and we had our own, so it had to merge sometimes but we always retained our own.***...I don't think I'll ever use that system [smudging] to practice in my healing, or I'll go so far as to say in my family's healing. (Karen)

Intrinsic to these comments is a respect and acknowledgement of other culture's ways and traditions -- of their "structure". As Karen emphasizes, sometimes different groups meet, and their ideologies and practices may "merge", but she retains a sense of pride in the distinct cultural ways of her people, ways which, for Karen, do not include other cultures' ways of healing.

is there a dene way?

> I didn't want to participate [in smudging, sweetgrass] - you had the choice - because it wasn't my culture. I didn't grow up with it. But I wanted to learn more about it, I was interested. But then they asked me if we had any traditional ways [of healing] and I felt strange since I couldn't answer them. I didn't know. (Nancy)

As several Dene in Fort Good Hope expressed their discomfort with "adopting" other Native American ways of healing, such as sweats and smudging, one may ask, then, "what are Dene ways of healing?" During interviews, sometimes the community member raised this question and other times I asked it directly. Mixed responses illustrate ambiguity and uncertainty over what might have been specific Dene ways of healing in the past. Some community members suggested further research, asking Elders about what these ways used to be. For others, this question brought feelings of sadness and despair linked to a sense of loss of Dene ways and practising traditions. In turn, for some Dene in Fort Good Hope, the respect and appreciation they hold for other Native American cultural approaches to healing are

ironically transformed into a kind of "healing envy" of their explicitly defined cultural ways of healing.

> I think there is [a Dene approach to healing]. I don't know what it is though. I don't know what it is....It was lost before I got old enough to know and it's never been passed down to me.....[Dene] have traditional ways of praying and stuff like that, and that kind of stuff I think people should know and accept that as part of their identity, the people that you are. Because now what people ask where....and what kind...that's all I have to offer. That's all I can say about myself. Whereas if you talk to somebody in Alberqurque or wherever. I'm Navaho, I'm from this tribe and these are our cultures! This is how we pray. They have all that! ***Like their prayers, a way of healing, like, they're so much more ahead, I think, where as here, we're...Oh we've lost it....We've lost it.*** (Margaret)

Alongside this admiration and respect, though, there is also an air of envy of other groups' adeptness at defining and expressing their culture to the rest of the world. Michael Taussig, in Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wildman, has discussed some implications of envy, particularly among Putumayo healers (1987:394). He terms envy as a type of "implicit social knowledge", knowledge which is acquired through practices rather than through conscious learning (1987:393). Envy, Taussig suggests, occupies a prominent position in social life. He argues:

> Above all it is envy -- discussing its manifestations and ramifications -- that provides, as it were, a theatre of possibilities in social life. It is on this stage that implicit social knowledge roams and scavenges, sharpening its sensitivity, ***its capacity to illuminate***, its capacity to wound. (1987:394 emphasis added)

It is on this "capacity to illuminate" that I would like to focus, and suggest that this kind of "healing envy" might influence, or perhaps illuminate, for some Dene, the affirmation of Dene ways and Dene tradition as being a fundamental element of Dene healing. In the above quote, Margaret admires the pride of Navaho people in affirming their identity through "prayers" and "a way of healing". In comparison, some community members in Fort Good Hope felt that people are losing their "Nativeness", and their identity as Native peoples, an identity which is, for many Dene, founded in Dene ways, language and tradition.

> People are losing their 'Nativeness'. They're losing their language and their culture. You see other communities -- like the Dogrib -- their

> language is so strong. but in this small community no one speaks their language. (Cynthia)
>
> Now a days the youth, they don't have any identity. They don't see any difference between them and white people. They don't have an identity with the past.... (Carolyn)
>
> It has a lot to do with how we've been hurt emotionally, spiritually. We've begun to feel ... when we talk about residential schools we were hurt in many different kinds of ways and so ***we begin to look at our ways as not as good as other cultures***... (Marie)

Certainly, this is not a question of one group, such as the Navaho, having a culture, and another, such as Dene, not having one. Rather, it raises the importance of identity in Aboriginal people's efforts toward bettering their lives and in movements toward self-determination. Margaret, who perceives the Navaho as strongly defining and practising Navaho ways of healing, suggests that these Navaho affirmations of identity position them "farther ahead", or perhaps on a path toward achieving well-being in their communities. These quotes reflect the words of many Dene in the community who expressed to me their feelings that people, particularly the youth, had lost their identity as Native people, of knowing their "roots", of understanding Dene history and of understanding Dene culture. As Marie explains above, some people directly link this decline of practising Dene ways as a result of being taught through schools, churches, and the government to name a few, that Dene ways are "wrong", "evil", and "not as good as the 'white man's' way". Even speaking their language of North Slavey in residential schools was considered profane and blasphemous, and often brought only pain and suffering to the Dene child.

illuminations

Clearly, "healing", for many Dene in Fort Good Hope, involves affirming their identity as Dene, a process which includes understanding Dene history and Dene ways, a process which for many is intricately connected with being on the land:

> Healing and wellness - they need to be given back their pride because a lot of these people have no pride at all. They're not proud to be Indian because I have yet to hear anybody say, "I'm proud. I'm proud to be Indian and I'm proud of it," or "I'm Native and I'm proud of it." Because they're not. They're not even proud that they're going

> trapping. They've lost all that. And they have no identity. A lot of these people have no identity, who I am, where I'm going, what I'm going to do.... ***I think people have to know who they are, what they were before, not who they are today.*** (Margaret)
>
> The more self-identity that a person has [is important for healing]. Like I don't see in what way it could ever hurt. ***You feel more complete when you know everything about yourself and about your people.*** I think it always helps....(Marie)
>
> ***...understanding your culture, understanding your history,*** where your people and where you originated from and your grandparents and their grandparents and how they live and just understanding how they lived then. (Carolyn)

One of the greatest tools toward "understanding of the past" is encompassed within the practice of storytelling. What some people may separate into distinct categories of oral histories, narratives, myths, and legends, for many Dene, comprise an understanding of Dene history and Dene culture. As I have discussed earlier, stories are told for distinct purposes, whether it be to discuss a certain Dene value or belief, or whether it be to convey past events at a certain place, a feature written across the land or voiced in its placename (see Blondin 1990, Cruikshank 1988). Guédon suggests that among Dene:

> Knowledge is not institutionalized. Rather it is always contextualized: socially, through its explicit link to the people transmitting it; geographically, through its many associations to a specific territory, and practically, by being embedded in concrete experiences and/or stories. (Guédon 1994:67)

Blondin's narratives about medicine power are congruent with this style and convey some of his understanding of the past. Regarding Guédon's analysis of the social context, I would consider not only the people transmitting the knowledge, but also those who are receiving it. Blondin's stories, through his publication, reach out to many Dene and non-Dene alike. Representations of history are frequently based on a set of chosen images to illustrate the past. Similarly, in current Dene representations of the past, certain images are highlighted and chosen to exemplify Dene history and "understanding how grandparents lived then". This includes, among many other features, the way of life of Dene as they moved across the land and ate "Dene food", a diet of meat, fish, and berries. Knowing Dene history involves

knowing Dene ways, a learning and living of Dene beliefs and practices. Dene ways may be envisioned as ways of becoming, ways of relating, and ways of learning, rather than as things, rules, or pieces of knowledge (Guédon 1994:63). As with medicine power, having knowledge and experience brings to one a type of medicine that can be used to better the lives of oneself, and one's people. For many Dene, these ways historically arise out of a life interwoven with the land, on the land, and of the land.

It is not surprising, then, that for many Dene in Fort Good Hope, an integral part of "healing" is the strong affirmation of Dene identity, one which is intrinsically based within "knowing" Dene history and culture, and Dene ways perceived as harmonious with life on the land. Understandably, some Dene in Fort Good Hope want to develop a healing programme that is "something of [their] own to do with the land", rather than travelling to "other people's land", and other people's philosophy, history, and culture.

hannah

At Deh Ho Sha, we were constantly reminded that the workshop was at the mercy of the elements. One morning, looking down the river, we noticed a windstorm building, a grey mass of cloud and sand blowing off the shores of the Deh Cho. Certain that a storm was on its way, I turned to the supply tent to fix down the end flaps. I had barely turned my back when I felt the force of the wind slam into my back, and my eyes were full of sand. Within a second or two, my sight registered my drastically changed surroundings: flattened tents, rolling boxes and bags, others scrambling to hold on to tents and bags to keep them from disappearing in the wind, and Hannah, a petite Dene Elder woman, hanging on to a post to keep the one remaining tent standing. The wind seemed to be blowing everything, including ourselves, yet Hannah stood firmly in her stance, unmoved by the force of the gale. The wind continued to howl, the rain followed, and time itself seemed to be captured in the *nit'si pa*, or whirlwind. I am not sure how much time passed, yet my memory remains fresh of the striking image of Hannah keeping the tent standing. Hannah, 78

years old, was dressed in a tartan skirt with grey wool socks pulled over light blue leggings, her feet in rubbers. Her red tartan shirt matched the red scarf she had pulled over her head, covering her long straight grey hair. Hannah had wide, soft eyes which seemed to reflect the wisdom that only years and experience can bring. Her back was continually slightly bent, her neck curved, and her eyes angled toward the ground. When I had first seen Hannah in the community, curiously, my initial thoughts had been that her back was bent as the result of hard work rather than of shame. I was struck both by sadness that such a distinction would have occurred to me, and by an increasing respect for Hannah. Whether in the community or on the land, Hannah was consistently working: at the camp at Deh Ho Sha, if I turned my eyes toward her, I was sure to see her walking over to the fire with wood, gathering fresh spruce boughs for the tent or for around the fire, or straightening the tent posts. Hannah was constantly moving and constantly working; yet, it was evident that she was content being in these surroundings, comfortable in this environment of being on the land. Before the rest of us had recovered from our surprise after the whirlwind blast, Hannah had already begun, on her own, resetting the tents which had fallen. There was work to be done, and this seemingly petite woman promptly demonstrated her strength and her ease of being on the land and adapting to its necessities. Being on the land, for some Dene, holds a history of pride and contentment in working and living. The land, equally for women and men, is a space and time where people have certain roles and responsibilities. Some Dene, such as Hannah, feel comfortable and knowledgable in these surroundings and in these roles. "Out on the land you know you're Dene. You know what to do...." Nothing, not even the *nit'si pa*, seemed to rock her strength.

IV. HEALING TRADITIONS

> *Healing?...I guess...I wouldn't say "healing". I would say "reviving the tradition".* (Charles)

using tradition

Recent academic literature has problematized the notion of "tradition" by questioning its bounded continuity as stable practice; some scholars have argued that (selected) traditions are "invented" as a means of serving contemporary purposes (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Roger Keesing (1989) has suggested that indigenous peoples have "created pasts" in assertions of identity in response to, or as resistance to, dominant colonial powers. These arguments move away from the assumptions that indigenous peoples are returning to, or revitalizing, established traditions. Rather, they emphasize the creation of traditions in the present: actions and beliefs which are portrayed as continuous with the true ways of the past. This debate over the "invention of tradition" has been valuable for provoking considerations of the role of "tradition" among contemporary indigenous societies, and the utilisation of tradition to serve a political agenda or legitimize certain aspirations. However, a critical shortcoming in some of these analyses lies in the attempt, whether explicit or implicit, to differentiate between "genuine tradition" and "invented tradition" (Hobsbawm 1983:4). Furthermore, the limitations of the resistance dialectic are reproduced in the contention that indigenous peoples' "creation of tradition" has only emerged in recent response to colonial relations (see for example Keesing 1989). This argument suggests a pre-colonial period in which "real" traditions and a "real" history were stable and continuous. In this perspective, only when Native peoples were forced to produce their identity in opposition to the colonial powers, was tradition "invented". With this interpretation similarly lies the implication that culture itself is "invented" merely within this colonial dialectic.

Central to these arguments of "invention" rests the association of tradition with authenticity, a correlation which becomes of particular concern among indigenous people's political struggles for land claims and self-government. Native American peoples have been placed in a position where they must prove their authenticity as Native peoples in both informal and formal spheres: informally to persuade non-

Native peoples to support their efforts, and formally in courts and to the government in attempts to re-acquire their land and self-governing rights (see Clifford 1988; Cruikshank 1994; Ridington 1990). This proof rests on the ability of indigenous peoples to illustrate their "genuine traditions": authenticity is equated with the continuity of a tradition, that is, an objectively definable essence or core of customs and beliefs (Handler 1986; Handler and Linnekin 1984). Furthermore, this illustration must be recognized within the constraining colonialist law to obtain its legitimacy within the state. The Native peoples' "case" is often hindered within this paradox: the indigenous group must perform, recite, and prove their traditions in front of a court which ironically does not recognize their cultural ways[39].

Understandably, then, suggestions that traditions are "invented" have not been well-received by Aboriginal peoples and their supporters who continue seeking to legitimize their authentic identity as Native peoples (see Hanson 1989, Linnekin 1991). Accusations of "invented traditions" can be fatal to Native peoples' arguments which are based on distinctive culture, "traditional" use of the land, and the right to govern themselves in a culturally appropriate manner.[40] At the root of this dilemma, then, is the equation of "genuine tradition" as authentic and "invented tradition" as spurious, or even the assumption that all tradition is "invented" and therefore inauthentic. For those who have not demonstrated continuity of these traditions (what denotes continuity -- 100 years? 50 years? 20 years?), their practices and beliefs, indeed their culture, again are devalued as illegitimate.

These recent critical examinations of "tradition" have been valuable for re-thinking the meaning of, and especially the use of, tradition. In this regard, I would

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[39] In the late 1980's, the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en peoples decided to present their case for a settlement of land claims before the British Columbia Supreme Court. During the lengthy proceedings, Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en publicly enacted narratives, songs, and dances before the court. In 1991, Chief Justice Allen McEachern controversially deemed these oral traditions as unacceptable evidence of detailed history. For a discussion of the judgment, see Miller (1992) and McEachern (1991). See also Cruikshank (1994:412-413).

[40] See C. Scott (1993) for a comprehensive discussion of reasons why policies on Aboriginal peoples should recognize the inherent authority of customary and traditional forms of aboriginal government, while similarly acknowledging that these forms are not static institutions but ones which adapt through both the "convention" and "invention" of tradition, without a loss of Aboriginal rights.

suggest we focus more on a fluid, transformative process of tradition, and follow Handler and Linnekin (1984:273) in emphasizing tradition as an interpretive process which embodies both continuity and discontinuity (see also Linnekin 1983, 1991; Hanson 1989). Tradition has never been a stable fixed entity, but rather embodies a selective process of beliefs and actions which are considered meaningful at a certain point of time. As Hanson relates to us in the New Zealand context, the "Maoris of the 1760s, no less than contemporary Maori activists, were moved by their own political agendas to appeal selectively and creatively to the tradition of their ancestors; and the same can be said for those ancestors, and so on indefinitely" (Hanson 1989:898). As Hanson argues, "invention is an ordinary event in the development of all discourse, which therefore never rests on a permanent foundation" (1989:899).

In order to accomplish this fluid view of tradition, it is imperative to distance ourselves from the concept of "invention" of "tradition", an association which suggests both an inauthenticity of these beliefs and practices (as opposed to the real tradition, or the real history) and also an acquired stability that this invented tradition becomes reified into a continuous stable future. Perhaps, in one hundred years, these "invented" traditions will no longer carry the same specific use or purpose that they have at this time; perhaps these practices or beliefs will fade away as they no longer provide the same function. We must also, therefore, cease to judge a specified tradition on a scale of authenticity.

If one considers tradition, as culture, to embody a much more pliant elastic process over space and time, preceding it with the adjective of "invented" is perhaps confusing. Indeed, all meaning is invented, or constructed, in some capacity. Of critical importance to the meaning of tradition is precisely its construction and the politics of its representation. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's remark that "tradition implies a localized reference point for power and knowledge, whether the point is being abandoned or reclaimed" (1993:59) proves extremely useful to signal this consideration, and denotes the specificity of tradition at a particular moment. Tradition, as it becomes revered, emerges as much more than a statement of the "things we used to do." Rather, tradition can be viewed as a localized point -- both in

space and in time -- as to what *selective* knowledge or experience becomes considered as traditional customs and beliefs, and as to the power associated with *who* is determining the constituency of these traditions. Tradition, then, as culture, is not a static eternal practice. Rather, certain traditions are chosen at particular moments, and specific people have the opportunity to make and to use these selections. Indeed, a dialectical relationship is at play as those with power are in a position to politically determine, reify, or create tradition, while in turn the actions of doing so enhance one's power. This dialectical arrangement embodies even greater significance when taking into account gender relations.

Caroline Ralston (1993), in a recent article, has discussed the implications of gender and tradition among outspoken Maori women political actors. According to Ralston, currently in New Zealand there is some dissension over whether Maori women should be taking leading political or religious roles (1993:25). Some people question the legitimacy of women's involvement with claims that it is not traditional for women to be in these political positions (1993:25). In particular, certain Maori leaders, and Maori and Pakeha scholars (though she does not specify their gender), claim that Maori women should not speak on *marae* (the open air court of a meeting house where speeches are made), as they did not do so in the past (1993:23). Ralston uses this example to illustrate how patriarchal ideology is supporting the movements of some Maori and Pakeha in constraining the image of the "traditional" role of women, thereby limiting women's rights in contemporary and future political and spiritual leadership roles (1993:26).

Alternatively, if we return our attention to the community of Fort Good Hope, it appears as if converse events are taking place. Rather than tradition being used to diminish the legitimacy of women's leadership in the community as Ralston describes among the Maori, it seems that certain Dene women are using notions of "healing", and of "tradition", as a basis of their political movements for social change. Indeed, if Dene women are instrumental forces behind affirming and reifying "tradition" (at least in this present moment) under the auspices of "healing", this raises arresting

questions as to how this influences the power of at least some Dene women within the community.

Marshall Sahlins, in Islands of History (1985), has similarly emphasized the political use of traditional beliefs in his theory of "mythopraxis". With his discussion of the Maori and the Pakeha in New Zealand, he stresses how peoples (in this case the Maori) may select myth, or parts of myth, to be used in the present, in the construction of history, and in action itself. This dynamic nature of myth, in which the "very experiences of the past are the way the present is experienced" (Sahlins 1985:54) has longstanding significance among Native peoples. Whether speaking about mythology or history, or storytelling or tradition, these interlinked and often analogous categories are not only noteworthy for their content, but also for the way(s) that they are used. On another level, the content of these stories and traditions, though significant and worthy of analysis in their own right, become almost secondary to the context surrounding their utilization. Who is telling these stories? To whom? And why are these stories and traditions being told in this certain time and space?

Certainly, Dene stories hold specific purpose and meaning. In this regard, Marie Guédon has related the words of Nabesna, a Dene Elder, from her 1970 field notes:

> Old stories good for training. When (s)he hears old stories, that's how (s)he learns h(er) own way. Have to keep Indian way. If you don't listen, you got like white man. (S)he talk white man way, (s)he don't good for nothing. (Guédon 1993:43-4).

Similarly, Julie Cruikshank has emphasized the importance of the *use* of oral history and narratives, especially in educating younger generations, both women and men, about traditions and cultural ways:

> To take orally narrated accounts seriously is not to suggest that they speak for themselves in any simple way or that their meanings are self-evident. One of the more incisive observations of contemporary anthropology is that ***meaning is not fixed -- that it must be treated in practice*** (1994:408 emphasis added).

That is, we must pay due attention to the use of stories, episodes, histories and traditions, if we are to best attempt to understand their meaning. These discussions of tradition point to a perspective which emphasizes the use of tradition and talking about

"Dene ways" as a crucial constituent of healing. It is not then a question of continued "authenticity", but rather a viewpoint on how meaning is constructed in the present, both in looking to the past, and looking to the future. James Clifford (1988), in his essay Identity in Mashpee, asks whether "any part of a tradition is 'lost' [or discontinuous] if it can be remembered generations later, caught up in a present dynamism and made to symbolize a possible future?" (1988:342). "Healing" is being used by Dene as a vehicle to represent the possible future, one that includes self-determination, a movement which is being led by women. Dene women are *using tradition* -- politically localized to heal persons, families, and communities through the building and strengthening of a common Dene identity; to focus on the empowerment of Dene women in banding together under these auspices of "healing"; and to address needs of particular concern to Dene women. I argue this explicitly below in regards to Dene women's heightened interest and excitement in re-establishing *-aet'sechí* -- practices associated with "becoming women".

> ***[Being Dene is] really important to healing, we need to get our tradition back, we need to get our traditional rituals back.*** (Sheila)

> Now a days the youth -- they don't have any identity. They don't see any difference between them and white people. They don't have an identity with the past. Rituals would be good for this -- for instilling in the youth a sense of identity, of who they are. Rituals are a time in which we learn respect and values. We teach our kids the little rituals day by day but nothing deep like barricading our daughter....It would be good to bring these back - good to help the youth learn about values, and about how to be good people, and how to make decisions....***We have to bring these rituals back. It's so important. It's part of our culture. You talk about culture -- language, values, traditions. It's part of who we are.*** (Susan)

-aet'sechí

Nestled along the sandy shores of the Deh Cho, a group of women huddled around the warmth of the evening fire and discussed what they felt were the "important issues in the community". During this evening session at the workshop at Deh Ho Sha, the men (three) and women (eight) had split into two gendered groups. Men's dialogue concentrated on working with the youth to build a stronger future,

while the women focused on the critical need to keep their culture, with a strong emphasis on "rituals" and traditions. Practices which were specifically emphasized, not only at this camp, but in my conversations with women and men in the community, were the "training periods" that girls experienced at puberty[41]. Indeed, many Dene Elders viewed these practices as integral to a healthy lifestyle and a Dene way of life.

Women especially were discussing *-aet'sechí* -- practices associated with a women's coming of age[42]. Elder Dene women described to me the varied experiences they went through which included seclusion from the rest of the camp or being confined to a certain part of the tent; being prevented from falling asleep by placing a pointed stick just under their forehead, so if their heads dropped, they would awake quickly; working constantly gathering and chopping wood, tending the fire, preparing foods, preparing hides, making moccasins and mukluks, beading; and not being able to drink or eat hot foods. Periods of seclusion ranged from the five or six days of the girl's first menstrual flow up to several months. Several Dene women related to me that this "training period" may last up to a year, though the rules about not sleeping and not eating hot food were less strict after the initial menses. A girl's experience of puberty was not kept secret from others, but rather, the family announced the event proudly. Girls wore strings of moose hide around their fingers and hands, signalling that they were undergoing this special training period. During this time, girls were also instructed by their mothers, grandmothers, aunts and other female relatives in Dene cultural beliefs and on the purpose of women's responsibilities (Nahanni 1992:23; Cruikshank 1975:11).

Early anthropologists among Dene noted practices associated with a woman's first menses as common among Athapaskan women (Osgood 1936, Honigmann 1946). Julie Cruikshank (1975,1979,1983,1990), in her research of "becoming woman" among Athapaskan women in the Yukon, has stressed that the most important time in

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[41] Ethnographers working among northern Athapaskans have generally claimed that women's puberty is more distinctly marked with specific practices and restrictions than that of men (Cruikshank 1975:1; Sue Hara 1980:287).

[42] *-Aet'sechi* literally translates as "to deny oneself" or "to sacrifice oneself".

a woman's life is during her first menses. Cruikshank (1990), in collaboration with Angela Sidney, Kitty Smith, and Annie Ned, has discussed through oral narratives and life histories the value of the skills a girl learns during this time of "becoming woman" (see also Cruikshank 1979,1983). These Athapaskan Elder women related narratives of how strong women effectively used their power of reasoning and practical skills to guide them towards their respective goals. Often these heroines were "stolen", taken to an unfamiliar camp, and escaped to return home to a familiar setting. Although stories of "stolen women" may appear in a fragmented Euroamerican analysis as representations of women as passive objects, conversely in Tlingit Athapaskan narratives, these "stolen women" were used to symbolize strong women who rely on learned, shared, "practical" knowledge to successfully achieve their goals (Cruikshank 1990:343). A woman's competence in a range of skills was especially learned at puberty (Cruikshank 1990:343;1975:11). Nahanni further argues that without "puberty rites", Dene women do not learn social relations or "how to work" (Nahanni 1992:27). According to Cruikshank et al., women who experienced lengthy seclusion were viewed with admiration (1990:11). This was, Cruikshank continues, possibly because sequestering was associated with acquiring ritual and practical knowledge unavailable to men (1990:11).

Cruikshank and Nahanni separately suggest that this training period has become obsolete, partly due to christian disapproval of these practices, in addition to the placement of girls at residential schools (Cruikshank 1975:1; Nahanni 1992:19). Apparently, few women today in Fort Good Hope had experienced *-aet'sechí*, and only a few of the younger girls were undergoing this special "training period" of becoming woman. One mother in the community conveyed to me the need she felt to continue this tradition with her daughters:

> It's like rituals and traditions. The Elders were so surprised that I did that with my girls. They thought no one did it any more. But it's real important. That's where you learn appreciation, to be grateful -- for a bed, blankets to cover yourself, warm food, warm tea!...and sleep. It's like heaven afterwards. That's why now I can get by on just a little sleep....There's things for boys becoming men too. These rituals. It would be good if more people did them today. ***It's important to keep***

> ***on to our rituals and traditions. I can't say why.....I guess it's part of healing.*** (Sarah)

-Aaet'sechí, for many Dene women and men, represented one of the areas where "healing" needed to focus on strengthening Dene culture. Indeed, I was struck by the overwhelming concentration on "ritual", and I must admit as an anthropologist I was shy to hear such concerns of "classical anthropology" being revived. Clearly, though, many Dene women and men in Fort Good Hope are drawing on a strength that, in their view, is associated with the "training period". And although people of all ages stressed its integral role in healing, many Elders expressed their perception of this "training period" as a method of prevention, and as a guide to well-being and to living the Dene way.

> In the older days, I think people were really stronger spiritually, holistically because of our tradition..... because our tradition, our culture and rituals, that was part of our spirituality. Young girls, we had to be put alone because they just turn into womanhood. There were certain rituals they had to go through, and the boys as well, and they abided by that. They put their foot down. This is what we have to do to respect ourselves, nature, the ground we walk on... (Sheila)

> I am not clear as to what this healing is all about. But what I think what we had in our life was this *-aet'sechí* that the young girl goes through ... this is the time to get her to go through this process to skill tone their whole body as to what kind of a person they should be....How you bring this child through [*-aet'sechí*] gives them a whole pathway as to how they are going to live their life. So *-aet'sechí* is so precious, so important to this young person's life....There's no mistake about it, when you bring that child through *-aet'sechí* -- there's no two ways -- that child already has a direction as to what her life is going to be in the future. It's so strong that's there is no two ways about it. That child's future is well built in her. And that's the only element that I see in my mind today, I'm searching in my mind as to what this healing is all about. Today what I see too is the few times that you hear people speak about it. The only time they tell about those things is when they are in those sessions and when they go back to their everyday home life, it's not being followed through... (Barbara, Elder)

Barbara, who is unsure about what "healing is all about", does recognize one Dene way as "healing": *-aet'sechí*. This time was crucial to the construction of a child's identity, and to giving her direction in her life. When I asked Rose, a Dene Elder woman, "what makes a person healthy", she answered:

> It's important for your mother and father to give you training. A child needs both parents. When I was young, I received this training, and now I don't know the meaning of laziness. I lost my mother when I was very young, but I learned these things from my grandmother. *-Aet'sechí* is especially important when a child learns her specialized skill of training.... Parents were so important. And they always told you to have respect for elders -- communication -- if you didn't have it, it was like you didn't respect them. Of course today this generation is lost and not doing well. They don't have the parents guiding them and training them. They didn't have training and now they are lost in life. I had training for good direction.... ***That's why I am what I am today.*** (Rose, Elder)

-Aet'sechí is critical in the construction of a Dene woman's identity: "that's why I am what I am today". Furthermore, it is a vital constituent of "being healthy", and living a long and healthy life. When Annie Ned described to Julie Cruikshank her experience of "becoming woman", and the various practices she followed, she explained, "All those things I did. That's why I'm old woman and still I'm good yet" (in Cruikshank 1990:274). Kitty Smith proclaimed, "I got four months, me [of seclusion]....That's why I'm old lady now, because I did that" (in Cruikshank 1990:214).

-Aet'sechí continues to be recognized as an integral step in the construction of a Dene's identity (see Nahanni 1992; Cruikshank 1990). Some women feel that younger women who have not experienced practices of "becoming woman" and the associated instruction, remain unprotected and at risk (Cruikshank 1990:372 FN34). Some Elders in Fort Good Hope identify the cessation of this practice as a direct cause of a current lack of identity among youth. The youth had never experienced *-aet'sechí*, they never had this "training for good direction", and Elders view this as directly hindering their self-determination.

> A lot of the elders think [because we don't practice *-aet'sechí*] this is why the youth don't have any self-determination. They can't complete a task because they've never been taught, you know, the proper way. And I notice that too. (Marie)

> Of course today this generation is lost and not doing well. They don't have the parents guiding them and training them. They didn't have training and now they are lost in life. (Rose, Elder)

> ...Because it's so - there's so much rules, so much things to observe but I think it's really important because of all the different things you learn like the women would learn their role in life and their importance in life and also the men too. ***You learn basic things like respect, sharing, for each other and maybe that's why there was less sexual abuse, less rape cases in the past.*** I'm not saying there was none, you know, but there was less...like alcoholism, all these things. There's so much things to learn about responsibility and you could tell a person who has been through these rituals because they're confident. (Marie)

The discontinuation of *-aet'sechí*, for Marie, was interlinked with the eradication of Dene "basic values" like respect and sharing. And, for Marie, she (and others) associate this with violence against women. Acknowledging the presence of sexual and spousal abuse in the past, she nevertheless perceives a direct link between this abuse and losing the values learned during these "training periods". Through "healing" and re-incorporating these specific traditions such as *-aet'sechí*, celebrated as integral to Dene identity, Dene women are using traditions to directly address concerns which are priorities to women in the community.

bearers of tradition

Frequently, the association of "women" and "tradition" is characterized with negative connotations. Women, as bearers of tradition are "backward", "left behind", and depicted as passive objects of Otherness. Michael Taussig, in Mimesis and Alterity, describes the gift-giving of the "white man" to Cuna Indians: guns, knives, and pants and hat to the men, and cloth for (traditional) clothing to the women (1993:154). He affirms that women are made "by Cuna chiefs as much as white men, into the 'real' Indians, the bearers of authenticity and alterity in their markedly Other clothing, nose rings, and haircuts" (1993:154). In particular, Taussig finds it especially remarkable that "there is such positive agreement on both sides that this is how it should be": Cuna men mimetic with white men, and Cuna women as Alter (1993:154)[43]. However, this classification of women into the realm of the authentic

[43] Taussig's reference to "both sides" is left unclear. Are the two sides Cuna men and white men, or Cuna and whites of both sexes? We are left uncertain if Cuna *women* are in "positive agreement".

Other is implicitly presented as negative, as not as worthy of the male's role of mimicking the Europeans. Conversely, I would argue that this marking of women as authentic and as bearers of "tradition" is, in Taussig's terms (borrowing from Benjamin), a dialectical image. Similar to Taussig's argument of the Cuna Indians drawing on the mystique and wildness of Otherness attributed by the colonialists, it is this very realm of Otherness and of "tradition" that women are promoting as the basis of "healing". In contrast to previous dismissals of women as bearers of tradition, Dene women are building on the salience of tradition in order to strengthen Dene cultural "vitalization"[44] movements. "Healing" and "tradition" have become newly elevated priorities on the political agenda of self-government, and as I have discussed earlier, have significant implications in the changing political dynamics and gender relations in Dene communities.

Lata Mani, in her discussion of the colonial reconstitution of *sati*[45] as Indian tradition through Brahmin texts (see also Spivak 1988), suggests that women became emblematic of tradition. Mani asserts that women are viewed as either "weak, deluded creatures who must be reformed through legislation and education", or as "the valiant keepers of tradition who must be protected from the first and be permitted only certain kinds of instruction" (Mani 1987:153). Mani further argues that this equation of women and tradition became a justification for the protection of the weak and subordinate aspects of culture against the corrupt manipulation by the strong and dominant (1987:153), and that this concept of "tradition" intersects with patriarchal notions of women as weak and submissive. Here, tradition and women are portrayed as weak and passive victims of the colonial invention of tradition: "women became the site on which tradition was debated and reformulated" (1987:153), and "women themselves are marginal to the debate" (1987:153).

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[44] I am using the term "vitalization" rather than "*re*-vitalization" to deter from the idea of returning to "true" ways of the past (per the above discussion on tradition) yet emphasizing this process of enlivening and gathering momentum based in cultural ways.

[45] "Widow burning".

In Spivak's well-known essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), she similarly argues for the lack of voice of subaltern women, using the same example of the colonial construction of *sati* as Indian tradition.

> It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern female is even more deeply in shadow. (Spivak 1988:287)

Both Mani and Spivak affirm that women are rendered passive by colonial and patriarchal societies. Women are marginalized and removed from the very debates which focus on them: tradition is played out on the bodies of women. Spivak asserts that "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak 1988:306).

I am not denying, here, the validity of Spivak's and Mani's (and others') arguments pertaining to the colonial codifying of tradition based on textual descriptions of practices and beliefs. These arguments, I believe, are significant in the critical review of the legitimation and authority of colonial forces. Rather, my purpose in relating these arguments is to stress the dialectical imagery of women as bearers of tradition, and as Benjamin and Taussig would argue, the current emancipatory potential which exists. As I have emphasized above, previous literature and ideology have equated women with tradition as powerless, without agency, and under a weakened negative "darkness". Alternatively, I would argue that in present struggles of Aboriginal identity and ethnonationalism, Dene women are transforming this powerlessness into empowerment. As "tradition" takes on a powerful political force and becomes a basis for Aboriginal claims to distinct status, land, and self-governance, it becomes an influential political tool. Rather than passive objects as bearers of tradition or "mirrors of culture", women are positioning themselves as active agents in determining and creating tradition. This healing movement, which is so interlocked with "tradition", emerges as a vehicle for women to gather in an emancipatory movement, one in which their voices become heard. Dene women are

raising their voices and telling a story, or creating a narrative, by selecting traditions and values and communicating this knowledge, this *power*, as a means of "healing" their communities. Perhaps the subaltern *can* speak as Dene women use tradition to speak to Dene men, to colonial society, and to themselves.

STORIES AND IMAGES: some words of conclusion

> -Aet'sechí *is important to healing...because there's so much you learn out of that period of time...like your relationships with people, yourself, like how you take care of yourself, how you relate to your group, and then your responsibility too. You're doing it on behalf of yourself, your group, and then your community.* ***It carries a lot of...you know...like...power. Maybe that's why it's kind of not practised too much any more.....*** (Marie)

-*Aet'sechí*, a time of learning Dene beliefs and practices, a time of "training", a time of gathering the knowledge that a Dene woman needs for her life, a time of instruction, a time which holds enormous power. As ethnographers working with Dene have repeatedly emphasized, a Dene's knowledge is built on learning and experience. And with this knowledge, there comes a certain power, a power used to guide one's way through life in this world. Perhaps, though, the power to which Marie refers, is not only a power associated with "becoming woman." Perhaps, Marie is also referring to the power of tradition, the power of practising Dene ways, of being Dene. Perhaps, Marie is reminding us of the power of "secrets", a power which symbolizes a space where Dene knowledge is considered safe and secure, where there is no fear that what is exposed will be lost in the non-Dene world. Perhaps, a certain power is held in the guarding of this information and experience, of this understanding of Dene ways, of being Dene.

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"It carries a lot of...you know...like...power." This seemingly short, simple sentence consolidates a wealth of images and meanings. "*It*", *-aet'sechí*, practices of "becoming woman", Dene tradition, learning of Dene ways -- "*carries*", comprising, embodying, representing, symbolizing -- "*a lot*", a wealth, a richness -- "*...you know...*", interrupting, a reminder of implicit social knowledge, that knowledge brings understanding, a pause, a moment which underscores the prominence of the following term -- "*power*" of having knowledge, the force of tradition, the strength of Dene ways, the power of women, the power of "healing".

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"It carries a lot of...you know...like...power." Marie's words come slowly, definitively, with purpose. Yet, she pauses, waits for the moment. Hesitations. James Clifford (1988), in his well-known essay Identity in Mashpee, has discussed the importance of hesitations. What do these moments of wait, of delay, of pause bring? Why are these moments of hesitation taken? As Clifford suggests:

> It is important to distinguish hesitation from resistance, for hesitation need not oppose *or* acquiesce in the dominant course. It can be an alert waiting, thinking, anticipating of historical possibilities. Along with the history of resistances we need a history of hesitations. (1988:343 emphasis in original)

Hesitations need not suggest complacency, nor simply resistance. Throughout this thesis, I have argued for the need to move beyond an understanding which bases itself solely in a resistance-hegemony paradigm. In order to comprehend the lives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada today, we must escape the limitations of the colonial dialectic. This does not mean, however, that we should not recognize the significance of the hierarchal relationship between indigenous peoples and a dominant Canadian society and government. Similarly, it is crucial to have an understanding of the historical colonial relations which have played an intense and complex role among contemporary Native peoples, relations which include a "history of resistances". However, the cultures of Native peoples were not created only with colonialism. While it is certain that the forces of colonialism can not be ignored, it is similarly critical to escape the limitations of this paradigm. Otherwise, there lies a danger of constraining our understanding of Native cultures. By regarding the lives of Dene as bounded by, or even solely created within, this binary of colonizer-colonized, we situate ourselves within a language of analysis which sustains this imbalance of power. Dene actions, Dene beliefs, Dene history, Dene ways, Dene culture, Dene themselves are denied any agency, creativity, life, ***power***, external to a dominant Canadian society. If we are even to attempt to understand and support Dene movements toward self-determination, we must look beyond the colonial space and employ a more nuanced analysis which recognizes Dene strengths and actions that transcend the limits of colonialism.

It is in this context that I have attempted, here, in this story, in this presentation of images, to communicate some of the richness of "healing" among Dene in Fort Good Hope. This montage of experiences, conversations, perceptions, and images opens a window to the complexity of "healing". People's lives, opinions, and ideas interweave throughout this thesis with discussions centering on issues of resistance, identity, tradition, and gender. As points connect and diverge, the intricacy of these connected elements becomes more apparent, and it is possible to gain a better understanding of how these issues are fundamental to the lives of some Dene in the community of Fort Good Hope.

As I have shown, throughout this discussion of "healing", one may not ignore the gender implications of this healing movement among Dene. I have attempted to convey and discuss the significance of the increasingly predominant roles of many Dene women in efforts to heal themselves, their families, and their communities. Although many Dene women in Fort Good Hope have differing ideas about the specific "right" way of "healing", the ambiguity and uncertainty of this concept have opened room for its interpretation and its usage. Several Dene women in Fort Good Hope are focusing on the association of "tradition" with "healing". Intrinsic to this perspective is the association of "healing" with assertions of Dene identity, which, for some, is based in Dene ways, in Dene history, and in Dene traditions. As I have argued, traditions are not static practices and beliefs, nor are they solely invented as resistance to colonialism, but rather they are fluid and transformative notions which can be adapted for a specific purpose at a specific moment. At this moment, in Fort Good Hope, several Dene women are focusing their energies on the principal tradition of *-aet'secht*, and drawing on the power that it carries. This time of "becoming woman" is being revered as a time of training, a time of learning about Dene ways, of understanding Dene history, and of understanding about being a Dene woman. Dene women of all generations -- Elders, mothers, youth -- are vitalizing *-aet'secht* as a means of "healing" to emphasize and work with the skills, knowledge and values that a woman learns during this "training period". Yet, these Dene women are drawing on another power -- the power of "tradition" -- as a means of "healing". As I recall the

excitement that lit up in the eyes of the women who had gathered around the fire while they talked about bringing their daughters through this "training", and the energy that gathered in the voices and faces of the Elder Dene women as they told me their thoughts about *-aet'sechí*, I sense the heightened energy of Dene women as they look to the future, of Dene women contradicting the constraining negative notions of "women and tradition", and using tradition as a point of celebration and empowerment, and of vitality and social change.

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