

Young Adults, Oral Culture and Languages  
Postcolonial Perspectives

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## Abstract

This study explores the dilemma facing young adults from former colonized cultures in their attempts to (re)claim their native, minority languages. It traces the historical clash of European, African and Aboriginal cultures, and the condescending attitudes Europeans adopt towards non-European cultures, which attitudes eventually lead to the colonization of such cultures, dwelling on the effects of colonization on African and Aboriginal languages, Twi and Kalenjin and Cree, respectively. Colonization has succeeded in dichotomizing the world's cultures into dominant and minority cultures, which has spilled over into languages used by the respective cultures; consequently, the world speaks dominant and minority languages. Just as dominant cultures are more visible than minority ones, dominant languages continue to overshadow minor ones. Consequently, the former dominate in major areas of communication--education, economics, technology, politics and entertainment.

This study examines how young adults from the former colonized cultures handle the differences between their minority cultures and the dominant ones that impact so heavily on their day-to-day existence in Canada. The study also explores the colonial implications of the numerous choices the young adults have to make in their quest to keep abreast with the times.

A combination of three focus group interviews and twelve fully structured interviews with eight students comprise the principal forms of data collection for this study. Additionally, I had four dialogue sessions with African and Aboriginal elders in order to solicit their opinions about good language skills. Participants are of African and Aboriginal backgrounds, aged between twenty and thirty five years, all of them in post-

secondary education at the time of the study. I analysed the data as similar themes emerged from the interviews.

In the final analyses, all the participants agreed that colonial processes have impacted negatively on oral languages and cultures. Oral languages and cultures are considered minority in comparison with the colonizers' languages and cultures. There was consensus that from their minority domains, oral languages and cultures grant distinct socio-cultural identities to the people inhabiting the culture, in similar ways to dominant cultures. Formal education has aided people from the (former) colonized cultures to critique colonizing processes. Yet, theories supposed to grant the former silenced good audience tend to be a marginalizing agent, because they stem from the Western worldview. The (former) colonized themselves tend to be implicated in the colonizing processes, due to exposure to Western education. Consequently, it is difficult to distinguish between the colonial and the post-colonial periods. The participants agree that oral languages and cultures are as authentic worldviews as the written languages and cultures. Each has complex inherent systems through which one can obtain knowledge about the world. Therefore, if people from the (former) colonized cultures invest proportionately in their native cultures, as they do with the dominant cultures, they imply the authentic natures of their cultures and ensure their concurrent existence with the dominant ones.

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## **Dedication**

To my aunt,  
Mrs. Prudence Owusu-Ansah,  
and to the memory of her late husband,  
Dr. J. Owusu-Ansah, for their assistance.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

Among the courses I took in this Master's degree programme, recurring issues were slavery and colonization and to a lesser degree, internal colonialism. Canada has experienced both colonization and colonialism. Canada, like Australia and New Zealand, presents a dilemma to postcolonial theory, because Britain granted them dominion status during the colonial period (Shohat, 2000, Bonvillain, 1993). The three countries are therefore not classic examples of colonialism. However, the three countries' internal affairs--the relationship between the European settlers and the Aboriginal Groups--portray internal colonialism (Shohat, 2000; Bahri, 1996). Naturally relationships other than cultural suppression developed among European settlers and native cultures in the African and American continents, to mention two (Haig-Brown, 1988; Highlights from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 2002); however, due to its pervasive and marginalizing nature, colonialism tends to either dominate or invariably colour most discussions about European and native North American relationships on one hand, and European and African relationships on the other hand.

“Colonialism traditionally refers to the establishment of domination over a geographically external political unit. Further, the unit or colony is usually inhabited by

people of different race and culture” (Blauner, 1969, p.395). Perley (1993) shares Blauner’s argument that the colonized tend to be dominated both economically and politically and are therefore subordinated to and dependent upon the more powerful colonizing country. Blauner notes in his article: “The colonizer usually exploits the land, the raw materials, the labour, and other resources of the colonized nations” (p.395). Another aspect that is brought out in this article is that “differences in power, autonomy, and political status are formally recognized, and the colonizer establishes mechanism to maintain that domination” (p. 395).

Western European settlers in Canada were not subjected to such drastic treatment from Britain. However, the social relationship that developed between the settlers and the Aboriginal dwellers on what became sovereign Canadian land did not comprise mutual recognition and respect. In many ways colonial development in North America resembles colonialism in Africa. The clash between oral societies and written cultures resulted in gross degradation of the former. African and Aboriginal cultures were not regarded as such. In fact, not only were the native groups, among others, considered as not having ways of learning: “No ingenious manufactures amongst them, no arts, no sciences” (Hume, 1997, p.334), but European explorers considered Africans and Aboriginals as inferior savages (Kant, 1997, p.63). Early explorers also refused to acknowledge native languages, particularly those of Africa, as intelligent human activity. According to Richardson (1994), a recent study of nineteenth century exploration narratives shows that Africans were frequently portrayed during this period not only as people without a civilization or written language, “but without language itself” (Richardson, p. 160). Of the sounds they articulated, the explorers had this to say: “[I]n the phantasmal Africa

constructed in these narratives, in so far as the native sounds to one another, theirs was ‘a language of demonstrated emotion rather than ideas and communication’” (Richardson, 1994, p.160). Emphasizing eighteenth century explorers’ disdain for African languages, Nichols (1989) writes: “[T]he words of countless Africans were assumed by many Europeans to be meaningless noise” (p. 1). Systems were therefore put in place to civilize the North American and African savages; later, the colonizers imposed their languages on the colonized. Eventually, the colonizer’s language swamped that of the colonized. The after-effects continue to this day.

European settlers dictated the pace in whatever relationship was to exist between natives and settlers. Perley (1993) identifies five areas of cultural subjugation: “Displacement of Aboriginal peoples by the European expansion; isolation and containment of Aboriginal people inherent in the reservation system; forced assimilation of Aboriginal societies; increasing political and economic domination of reservation by the colonizers, and the development of a racist ideology portraying Aboriginal people as backward, savage, uncivilized and childlike” (p. 120). The last area appears to have captured it all in that it legitimises the act of cultural subjugation that has characterized most relationships between Europeans settlers and oral cultures in North America--and Africa--for years. If there existed a culture that was really “backward”, “savage”, “uncivilized” and childlike, certainly undesirable qualities, then that culture deserved all the help it needed to enlighten itself; after all, the European world was trying to move ahead not only by exploring hitherto unknown areas, it was also trying to find refuge from bad social conditions in various parts of Europe, Nichols, (1989).

That, however, was not and has never been the case; the issue has always been

that every culture possesses both commendable and degrading traits. While the former is a constant source of emulation, the latter is always deplored. The nations that went exploring in past centuries saw only the best in their cultures but demeaned oral cultures in every possible way. Apparently, those nations were prepared for new, unknown lands, with human and natural resources, but certainly not new and unknown people with unknown or different cultures. The only possible way they could deal with the cultural shock of meeting with people who were so different from themselves was to characterize differences as asocial and amoral, punishable by cultural annexation or subjugation.

Both colonizer and colonized desperately continue to grapple with the after-effects of cultural atrocities committed more than five centuries ago. For Aboriginal Canadians, one aspect that suffered severely was that of native languages. In short, the impact of colonialism on oral languages is of penetrating and perpetuating dimensions.

Native children who received formal education were forbidden to speak their own language (Perley, 1993, p. 123). Instead they were taught the colonizer's language: "Early initiatives in native education focussed on teaching dominant language to native children" (Stairs, 1993, p. 85). Such children grew up with very little or no knowledge about their mother tongues. Unable to speak their language, it was difficult for them to learn about their cultures. Those children grew up more knowledgeable about Western cultures than their own, since the system leaned heavily towards the dominant group: "In 1668, Louis XIV directed the [French] clergy [who taught natives] to encourage the Aboriginal people to adopt the superior French culture and to reject everything that was Aboriginal" (Perley, 1993, p.122). Aided by oppressive systems, Western cultures ended up dominating, with native cultures on the margins (Highlights, 2002). Aboriginals were thus colonized on

their own lands--internal colonialism (Perley, 1993, p.122). Centuries later, the scales are still heavily tilted in Western favour. Aboriginal texts reveal Aboriginal concerns; their tradition is not wholly recognized by mainstream school curricula. It is especially painful for people of Aboriginal origins that their languages are not taught in mainstream schools, despite previous and continuous efforts to rectify this. As a result, some Aboriginal languages are already extinct; others are in danger of becoming so.

Additionally, the information technology and urbanization have sped the rate of Aboriginal assimilation in the country. Mander (1991) discusses some negative impact of television on Aboriginal cultures. Among others, he refers to the Dene community in the Northwest Territory of Canada. The Dene Community has not had access to satellite television for long, yet oral community life has been disrupted in many ways. One traditional practise strongly affected is story telling. The native language is not spoken as much as it used to be; people in the community are getting more and more comfortable with speaking English, due to its regular use on the television. School attendance is also affected. What is worse, television has influenced both young and old in the Dene community.

### **Need for the Study**

The issue of children growing up with little knowledge of their mother tongues caught my attention. My inquiries revealed that certain schools in Canada teach Cree and a few other native languages; these are incorporated into the Language Arts curriculum. However, most native languages are not taught in schools. I believe that native language studies should form an integral part of primary and secondary education. Losing one's native language must be a painful experience, yet not only has this happened to many

Canadian natives, but the problem is escalating. Having studied my own language, Asante Twi, throughout primary and secondary schools, I can appreciate the loss involved for the Aboriginal school children of Canada who cannot study their own language.

Part of the vernacular curriculum in Ghana is the study of traditions and customs, as well as other social practices, and the relationship between Twi and other languages. Studying my native language thus reinforced my personal and cultural identity within a multicultural setting. Ghana has so many ethnic tribes with numerous languages, in addition to an inextricable relationship with the West, Ghana being a former British colony. Currently, living in a multicultural society, where I do not often get the chance to speak my native language, that sense of identity is very secure. Studying my native language also made me develop a better appreciation for my second language, English; English language has always been one of my favourite subjects. Also, I learnt to respect all other languages, whether dominant or minority.

My experience as a native language student has taught me that if children are not taught their native languages in schools, they could grow up without much knowledge of their native customs and traditions. Such a lapse could carry heavy consequences for the affected individuals, especially when it comes to cultural identities, current efforts to encourage multi-cultures notwithstanding. Living in and respecting other peoples' cultures, the ideal multiculturalism promotes, does not preclude the need for individual cultural identities.

The days when the colonized were forbidden to speak their own language are gone. Granted, colonialism persists in many subtle forms; but there are appreciable chances for persons from minority cultures to study their own languages. Various school

programmes in Africa and Europe make provision for vernacular studies. I am interested in the contemporary native reaction, especially that of the younger generations, to native language. I have noticed the indifference of some Aboriginal young adults towards their native language, a disturbing trait which runs in most Ghanaian young adults. In view of the strenuous efforts to combat the harmful effects of past colonial acts, I am constantly fascinated by the desire of some (former) colonized young adults to slight native ways while constantly reaching for dominant ones. Such young adults sometimes appear to glow in their inadequacies when it comes to native ways of knowing. The fact that a good number of Ghanaian young adults possess mainly colloquial skills in native languages does not seem to be an issue to them; rather they invest so much of themselves in dominant languages. They are also keen on mastering various aspects of the dominant culture; apparently, to such young adults, the ways worth knowing are the ones that dominate practically all aspects of society. The minority ones probably have not much to offer, in their thinking. With the current emphasis on multiple ways of knowing, I find it interesting that equal enthusiasm is not expended on minority cultures in order to ascertain what they can contribute to the building of society, hence my desire to find reasons behind such attitudes.

I also noticed a slight disparity between the Canadian Aboriginal and African colonial experience. Whereas with the former, native languages were forbidden in most cases, with the latter, the colonizer decided to study the native language in order to facilitate communication<sup>1</sup>. Thus the Ghanaian native does not share the traumatic history of being alienated from his or her mother tongue. That does not erase the fact that colonial administrators communicated in their own language. English was (is) the medium of

expression and continues to dominate native Ghanaian languages<sup>2</sup>. The overall effect is that the colonizer's language, English or French, has continued to dominate in most (former) colonies. The question arises as to contemporary generations' attitudes toward native languages in contemporary societies, the communicative media of which make it increasingly easy for dominant languages to marginalize minor ones.

This study was motivated by my desire to find out from both Africans and native Canadians the role native languages play in their lives, past and present. My interest arose from the (post)colonial implications of whatever attitudes the former colonized might adopt. I wanted to find out from my participants whether having a different language helps or undermines their personal and cultural identities in multicultural settings, or if it matters to them. Because I talked to people with colonial backgrounds, I wanted to know the factors that influence their choice of language, primary or secondary, in everyday situations. Their choice might help to determine their position in a (post)colonial world.

Finally, I wanted like to explore an aspect of languages, proverbs, also riddles and idiomatic expressions. Proverbs feature in all languages, both ancient and modern. It appears to be one area in which languages could assume equal significance. In that capacity, proverbs probably highlight the bonds that exist among languages. Therefore, I set off to explore this idea of a bond among languages.

### **Research Questions to be Examined**

The primary research questions examined were: What do participants know about their culture and the place of language in that culture? What could be the postcolonial implications of former colonized subjects' deep knowledge or otherwise of their native language and culture and how does that affect their socio-cultural identity? A follow up to

those questions are the following sub-questions: 1. How has my experience as a native language student helped my socio-cultural identity within a dominant culture? 2. Does native language enforce the ethnic identities of my participants and how? 3. What difficulties do young adults from minority cultures encounter in speaking their mother tongues and why?

### **Definition of Terms**

**Aboriginal:** This term broadly refers to the native people of Canada, those who lived on the land before the European settlers arrived, including First Nations people, Inuit and the groups who later came to be identified as the Metis.

**Akan:** The most widely spoken language in Ghana, spoken by about 42% of the Ghanaian population. It has five dialects, Asante Twi, Akuapim Twi, Fanti, Brong and Okwawu, the dialects of five tribes. My mother and father are from the Brong and Asante tribes respectively, so I belong to the two tribes.

**Asante:** The term identifies the dialect spoken by the Asante tribe of Ghana. It differentiates the Asantes from the Akuapims of Ghana. Both tribes speak the same dialect. However, Asantes speaks Asante Twi, whilst the Akuapims speak Akuapem Twi, with dialectal differences.

**Ethnic:** This is used synonymously with 'native' to 'modify' culture. By using the terms synonymously, I do not imply that only the cultures discussed in the study have ethnicity, neither am I insinuating that dominant cultures do not have ethnicity. I have used the terms synonymously in an attempt to indicate their close links when it comes to cultural and social identity.

**Found cultures:** Refers to the written cultures to which European explorers belonged.

**Ketewa:** An Akan expression which means the younger of two people, animals or objects.

**Kwaku:** The Akan name for males born on Wednesday.

**Maliseet:** A close relative of Micmac. It is spoken in New Brunswick and Maine.

**Minority groups:** The expression refers to the African and Aboriginal cultures represented in the study.

**Mother tongue:** Currently, the term is used variously, but in this study it strictly means the indigenous or primary language of a socio-cultural group.

**Multicultural:** A term that is not looked on with favour by many Indigenous people! It is a Federal policy that is seen as hypocritical. However, in this study, the term always presupposes acceptance and dignity for all cultures. In other words, the study attempts to acknowledge all cultures with equal importance. It therefore considers each culture worthy of emulation. The study also recognizes that no culture is perfect. In short, the study does not put any one culture on a pedestal.

**Native language:** The expression refers to the languages of the African and Aboriginal students that I worked with. I am not implying that dominant languages do not qualify as native. English is native to its first speakers, so is French. The expression helps to differentiate between English and the oral languages discussed in the study.

**Panin:** The term is an Akan expression for senior or an older of two people or animals.

**Symbiosis:** Kristeva (1998) uses this term to describe the age at which a child makes sounds that cannot be understood by the people around him or her. The child attempts to communicate, but the articulated sounds have no meaning for society.

**Symbolic:** According to Kristeva (1998), at this stage an individual has developed enough linguistically to use language in a fluent manner. He or she can communicate ideas ably,

which means conformity to the conventions that govern the use of language. Kristeva is deriving this term from Jacques Lacan.

**Twɔ:** One of the five dialects of the Akan language. The other four are Akuapem, Brong, Okwawu and Fanti. Brong and Twɔ are my native dialects.

**Vernacular curriculum:** On the Ghanaian school timetable, native language studies are referred to as vernacular.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Research Methodology

So much preparation goes into a study; researchers must of necessity work their way through various methodologies before they can eventually settle on a definite approach. Different studies require different approaches. A researcher might decide on a particular methodology for a particular study, yet that choice might not preclude utilizing other methodologies for broader investigative purposes. One might therefore presume that every study is the possible result of multiple approaches (Glesne, 1999). Similarly, this study is the result of several such studies shaped by a qualitative research methodology.

#### **Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research seeks to make sense out of people's stories and the ways in which they intersect (Glesne, 1999). That is why I have used three stories to build my study: one section constitutes revisiting my native language learning experience, exploring that aspect of my education; another focus attempts to make sense out of the stories told by African and Aboriginal participants/students and the stories of Twi and Cree elders. The interpretations derived from these stories are used raise awareness about the type of identities (former) colonized subjects can carve for themselves within a multi-cultural environment in which cultures do not share dominance. In that respect, as I set out to observe, talk with other students and analyze my information, I am also part of the main research instrument (Glesne, 1999, p. 5). Bringing in my own story renders the

study subjective and presupposes bringing in my own biases; however, the research process lends itself to biases despite efforts to create meaning objectively (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Nevertheless in analyzing research data and drawing conclusions, all efforts will be geared towards interpretive fairness (Glesne, 1999).

Analyses are done within the postcolonial paradigm, but are extended to cover theories such as postmodernism (Glesne, 1990, p. 15) and (post) feminism. To wit, the study explores certain notions about races and cultures. It attempts to challenge some of the ideologies that have continued to dichotomise dominant and minority cultures. Participants considered whether the former colonized cultures also possess authentic knowledge. Though the study stems from the colonial histories of Africans and Canadian Aboriginals, the aim is to present oral cultures and native languages as authentic components of postmodern multiple ways of learning. In other words, if dominant languages and cultures are seen as channels of learning about the world, the study explores the possibility of oral languages possessing the same inherent qualities. A formal interview process was used with the objective to make the sessions as conversational as possible in order to foster an environment that might help build trust between the researcher and participants; hopefully this generated genuine responses from participants. (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). In this way the results reflect many voices and not that of just the researcher (Glesne, 1999).

The study considers issues from cultural, social and individual perspectives, ascertaining from participants their views on language and culture, as well as the manner in which these individuals perceive dominant and minority languages and cultures. This helps to determine whether both categories of languages hold equal significance for

participants. I spoke with ten participants on formal and informal basis. Participants were asked to consider the relationship between language and culture, and between language and individual identity. They were then required to define their identities within these parameters.

### **Participants**

Four participants were purposefully selected from the international and Aboriginal student population on and off campus. There was the risk that that participants' connection with the university community would obviously build in a certain bias in their attitudes towards indigenous languages and cultures, but that did not happen. All interviewees have oral languages for mother tongue. Participants ranged between the ages of twenty and thirty-five. The researcher falls within that age group; also her Ghanaian contemporaries' attitudes toward their native languages prompted her to do this study. The study might help the researcher to understand the reasons behind her generation's apparent preoccupation with dominant languages, but first a brief background of the four participants:

Kwaku Panin is a Ghanaian and a second year undergraduate student studying science at the university of Saskatchewan. He is very knowledgeable about his Asante background, basically, because he got the opportunity to be taught at home. He also went through the public school system in Ghana and was further exposed to the culture through the vernacular curricular.

Rachel is a young Kenyan woman studying Social Science at the university of Saskatchewan. Her mother tongue is Kalenjin. Of the international students that I interviewed, she happened to be have been in Canada for the longest period; she had been

in Canada for five years when interview took place. Despite growing up in the city in her home country, she has always had the opportunity to spend much time with her grandparents in her African village. Such visits enabled her to learn her culture from her grandparents. She affirms that she knows a lot about her culture and speaks her native language very well.

Eunice is a young Cree woman doing a year post-secondary education programme in Commerce. She has spent most of her life in the city. Her contact with the Aboriginal reserves occurred during her teenage years. She appreciates her Aboriginal culture and is currently making efforts to be taught by the elders in her community. She speaks a bit of Cree; she is taking Cree lessons from some of the elders in her Cree community.

Eben, a Cree young man was finishing a business programme at the university when I interviewed him for this study. His only contact with the reserves occurred when he was a child. His family left the reserves whilst he was still a child. He was planning on taking Cree language classes at the university in order to improve his native communicative skills at the time of the study.

### **Focus Groups**

Two focus groups were selected from the African and Aboriginal student population on campus. All the groups come from oral cultures; they also share colonial histories. Most importantly, they are witnessing the dominance of the English language over oral ones. I had three focus group discussions with the two groups, one Aboriginal session and two African sessions. I began the first of each session by asking the group to share their experiences about native languages, both at school and at home. At the Aboriginal session, Becky and Mercy related their experiences at the residential school,

where they were forbidden from speaking Cree. The only Cree teacher, who defied the school authorities and taught the children Cree, secretly, was expelled for disobeying the rules. I then asked the groups to discuss factors that influence their choices of native and dominant languages. Currently, both Mercy and Becky live in the city. They speak Cree fairly well, yet they do not possess the fuller language skills of the older people who can create extensive discourses through Cree. The two women have limited chances to speak Cree because most of their contemporaries in the city do not speak Cree at this point; the two also get laughed at by fellow Aboriginal people when they speak Cree.

The African group also discussed their school experiences. Frank and Kwaku Ketewa went through the private school system, yet, Frank got the opportunity to learn the vernacular in the early years of schools whereas Kwaku Ketewa's school did not make any provision at all for native language studies. Both got the opportunity to study their native languages at their respective secondary schools. They argued that economic factors play a huge role in young people's choice of language. They however agree that native language is crucial to the continued existence of any particular culture. The sessions helped me to formulate some of questions for the formal interviews and the dialogues with the elders. I talked to other Africans and Aboriginals on informal basis.

All three sessions preceded the formal interviews. Both groups decided to have all three-group discussions in the researcher's office. The African sessions occurred in the evening whilst the Aboriginal session was held during the day.

### **Background of Researcher**

This study was conducted by and from the perspectives of a female Ghanaian student who is also a subject of the study. Being an African and a woman renders the

researcher a subject of multiple oppression; as such, the study provides the opportunity to discuss issues from both socio-cultural and gender perspectives. Nevertheless the study strives for fairly heterogeneous perspectives, hence the utilization of formal interviews and dialogue sessions with three categories of students and elders (Palys, 1997).

This attempt at heterogeneity hopefully generated diverse enough views to render the study multi-cultural enough to make the final report broadly authentic. Hence the participants are of West and East African and Aboriginal backgrounds specifically, with native Cree speakers from Canada.

### **Data Collection**

I talked to African and Aboriginal students on an informal basis in order to find out what they know about their native language and culture. Responses from those interactions yielded further questions for the study and/or ensured broader interpretation. I also conducted formal interviews the interpretation of which formed part of the data for the study. I had conversation sessions with Twi and Cree elders, anticipating that the elders would bring a certain amount of linguistic sophistication to the study by sharing their knowledge on their respective languages, especially that of proverbs in the languages. Whilst the elders were not considered a formal source of data for the study, initially, relevant information they supplied ended up as part of the data.

### **Dialogue Sessions**

I conducted dialogues sessions with elderly speakers of Twi and Cree in the hopes that they possessed fuller language skills than the young adults and hence, could provide insight into the inherent qualities of the oral languages that render them rich communication media as well as sources of knowledge. The dialogues focused largely on

proverbs and the functions they play in the two languages. I concentrated on various definitions, the origin or source of proverbs and their significance in languages and cultures. I offer a brief introduction of the two elders:

Nana is a grandmother in her seventies from Ghana. Out of the five dialects of Akan, she speaks Brong and Asante very well. Having spent most of her life among the Akan people in Ghana, she comes with strong knowledge about the history and culture of her people. Her arrival in Saskatoon was timely for it enabled the researcher to use her as one of the participants for the study. The dialogues, held in Twi, had to be later translated by the researcher.

Elder Robin is a young Cree elder in one of the Saskatchewan reserves. He teaches Cree in a K-12 school on the reserve. He speaks English very well. There were no language barriers during our dialogues. Though younger than Nana, he brought considerable experience to the study. Being a former residential school student himself, he was able to explain further some of the issues initially raised by the Cree focus group.

I had two dialogue sessions with each elder. At each session I had ready notebooks, cards and pens with which I recorded notes and other helpful observations. The elders' comments are used in the final interpretive analysis.

The following were my guiding questions to the elders:

1. Please define and explain proverbs in your language.
2. Tell me about the sources or origins of proverbs in your language.
3. What are the uses of proverbs in:
  - (i) conversations
  - (ii) life experience?
4. What are the aesthetic values of proverbs in your language?

5. Could you please explain to me the reason(s) behind the use of proverbs in your native language?
6. “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” Is there an equivalent of this old proverb in your language? How does yours differ from the English one in terms of sentence structure and semantics and implied metaphors?
7. What is the source of the proverb and what is (are) the underlying morale?
8. If there is an equivalent proverb in your language how does that impact on the differences between your mother tongue and the English language?

#### Interviewing

During the interviews, tape recorders and microphones recorded conversations between researcher and participants. The researcher employed all the senses in order to interpret gestures, facial expressions and body language of participants. Useful comments made before and after formal interviewing sessions formed part of the interpretive analysis.

#### **Interview Timelines and Procedures**

There were three interviews sessions with each student participant. The interviews and dialogues were scheduled over two months, from April to May 2001. Each interview session lasted about an hour. Interviews were on a one-on-one basis, conducted at the participant’s convenience. Because participants are mostly students, sessions were scheduled around their free periods. The researcher went to the homes of the two female participants for all six interviews. The Ghanaian participant always came to the researcher’s office to be interviewed. The male Cree participant had his first interview in

the researcher's office; the subsequent ones were held in the researcher's home. Hopefully, the relaxed environment allowed the researcher to observe the participants' interactions, choice of language, sentiments towards native languages and tolerance levels for other cultures and languages.

### **Interview Questions**

Interview questions were designed to prompt open responses from participants. Efforts were made to avoid limiting participants to a particular point of view. Participants are regarded as collaborators; hence their open responses contributed to the authenticity of the study and of interpretation. All participants were asked to respond to the questions below:

1. Tell me about your thoughts on language and culture.
2. Briefly describe the function of language in your everyday life.
3. In a broader context, would you say that language plays a more important role than what you have just described?
4. Based on your understanding of languages, if you had to compare dominant and minor languages, how would you rate each?
5. Please explain mother tongue
6. Does mother tongue influence how you define yourself as an individual? Explain.
7. Should mother tongue be of interest to native speakers in these present times?
8. How fluent are you in your mother tongue?
10. Do you consider proverbs, idiomatic expressions and figurative speech as part of fluency in a language? If not, describe your idea of fluency.
11. Considering the last question, how would you now rate your fluency in your mother

tongue?

12. “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”. Could you tell me if there is a proverb in your native language that corresponds to this English one?

13. Let us talk about the similarities and/or differences between your version of the proverb and its equivalent in English.

### **Data Analysis**

Part of the data for this study is in the form of all the available information I gathered for my literature review. I transcribed the interviews I conducted and used them as part of my research data. At the end of both interview and dialogue sessions, I analysed the data using the major themes that emerged from participants’ responses (Glesne, 1999).

Then I assembled all the themes under five broad categories:

1. The role of language in society—what linguists and theorists say; the content and art of oral languages.
2. The colonial experience that led to the dominance of the colonizer’s language.
3. The choices facing young adults from oral cultures.
4. Differences: complementary or antagonistic.
5. The complexities of the (post)colonial processes, some implications.

### **Reporting the Findings**

I studied the interview responses and built on recurring themes and/or common responses from the data. The four responded to all the interview questions. Each had a childhood story about language. The experiences ranged from home through the language community to the classroom. The four interviewees all grew up in urban centres; they

have busy parents who cannot spend the time desired to teach them about their languages and cultures. All four have also had contact with their respective rural communities in the past, either through their immediate families or through the help of the extended family. The four young adults all have close relationships with their grandparents, whom they also look upon as resource people on issues of language and culture.

The young adults are conscious of the impact of colonialism on oral languages and cultures. They acknowledge that young people from oral cultures find it a struggle to give equal attention to both dominant and minority languages, mainly due to economic, political and technological constraints. Among other reasons, they argued, one needs dominant languages to meet world standards of success. They unanimously acknowledge that dominant and minority languages and cultures bear the same importance, when weighed equally, yet they are forced by world trends to give more attention to dominant languages and cultures, especially within the Canadian mainstream society. They also argued that due to formal education and the quick tendency of the (former) colonized to lean towards the dominant cultures, it is difficult to draw a line between the colonial and the post-colonial periods. These themes shaped the final report.

I had to call on participants from time to time to verify points I found difficult to understand. In addition to the oral and literary data, there were everyday experiences that I deemed relevant to my study; I used them to develop my story. The report materialized in the form of chapters. Chapter one spells out the research perspectives and the researcher's motivation. Chapter two describes the research methodology. Chapter three, the literature review, examines various schools of thought and the impact of language on society: this chapter also explores the functions of language as they are discussed by

certain linguists and theoreticians. The chapter also juxtaposes oral languages with the dominant ones, drawing on the arguments put forth by the individuals whose works are used. The chapter traces the historical subjugation of oral cultures which eventually led to the marginalization of oral languages, which in turn has given way to young adults from oral societies encountering obstacles that constantly interfere with efforts to become better acquainted with native languages. Chapter Four comprises the stories that emerge from the interviews, focus group sessions and informal conversations; the researcher's story also appears in this chapter.

The first part of Chapter Five focuses on the young participants' responses to the proverb, "The fathers have eaten the sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge". From the responses, the chapter examines the ways in which three languages utilize the same proverb for similar or different understandings. The chapter utilizes the understanding that might be gained from analysing the proverb above to explore some linguistic significance and socio-cultural dynamics of proverbs, riddles and idioms in general, in ancient and modern languages, dominant and minority ones as well. The chapter concludes by locating the proverb within the (post)colonial discussion. Chapter Six works out the theoretical implications of the study. The chapter brings in the (post)colonial perspectives. It combines the literature and conversation analyses and highlights their significance within the (post)colonial theory; it also explores the complexity of the colonial processes. The chapter appeals, especially, to the indifferent young adults from (former) colonized cultures to revisit their attitudes towards their native languages and cultures. The chapter discusses the role of formal education in the intellectual pursuits of people from the former colonized cultures. Chapter Seven answers

the research questions and sums up the findings of the study.

**Protocols Used**

Application for Approval of Research Protocols: Appendix A

Participants' Consent Form: Appendix A

Data/Transcript Release Form: Appendix B

Debriefing and Feedback Form: Appendix B

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Review of the Literature**

The works in this review are chosen from three literary categories. The first category consists of literature dealing with theories of language, the art of oral languages and linguistic significance of proverbs in languages--ancient and modern, written and oral. The second category consists of literary works on slavery and antislavery and postcolonial and postmodern theories. The second category is especially relevant because it deals extensively with the condescending attitudes that led to the colonization of Blacks in Africa and Aborigines in North America. The inclusion of eighteenth and nineteenth century writers, especially, Hegel and Kant, often noted for their critical writings, is to highlight some of the absolute racist writings, which though not relatively popular, are crucial to the prevailing racial ideology of European Enlightenment (Eze, 1997). The second category also deals with changes in contemporary thought: changes which seek to bring the marginalized into the centre; changes emphasizing that the former colonized has the ability and right of knowing. The last category is relevant for the light it sheds on the language situation, partially or fully, in Africa and North America as well as other continents. While the list is not exhaustive, it provides an ample theoretical framework for the study.

#### **Language as an Organized Social System**

Language serves multiple purposes in the lives of a people. A very crude

definition of language might be the sounds that human beings articulate to effect communication. Nancy Bonvillain (1993) stresses the communicative relevance of language to humans: “It is the primary means of interaction between people (p. 1). In other words, language allows human beings to communicate with one another. If this were the only function of language, it would suffice for a great role in the lives of humans. However, language does more than effect human communication. Bonvillain extends the role of language when she describes it “[as] an integral part of human behaviour” (p. 1). More than simple human behaviour is being alluded to. According to Noam Chomsky (1966), “it has always been clear that the normal everyday use of language involves intellectual abilities of the highest order” (p. ix). Chomsky’s statement underscores the intellectual characteristics of language. It also presupposes the intelligence of humans who use language. The ability to formulate thoughts in one’s memory and voice such thoughts in linguistic and non-linguistic terms that others can relate to in various aspects of life must clearly involve some form of human intelligence. That all cultures practise such communication, diversely, therefore places all human languages on a certain intellectual wavelength. Other linguists and theoreticians reiterate the importance of language to society.

Linguist Ferdinand de Saussure discusses the social significance of language. What he finds intrinsic or fundamental to human nature is the ability to construct language or social systems (Saussure, 1916). He takes language a step higher than mere articulation of sounds. Saussure’s language (*langue*) is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit its members to use that faculty. This creates a firm relationship between

society and language. Society empowers individuals with language; inversely, individuals acquire their language from society. In other words, society endows individuals with language, and individuals use language to promote and preserve society. Thus Saussure removes language from the physical realm and makes it an intrinsic and reciprocal process. In fact, he makes it heterogeneous, a multi-faceted concept which simultaneously functions on the physical, psychological and intellectual levels.

The versatility of language appears to emanate from subsequent human capability in managing language for diverse endeavours. Perhaps that is partly what Bonvillian (1993) alludes to when she writes: “Language is enriched by the uses that people make of it” (p. 1). When people are able to make diverse use of language, they create meanings that render language highly productive cum proactive. Bonvillian discusses three types of meaning: “Situational meanings which are conveyed through forms of language that occur or are excluded in various contexts” (p. 1). Next she describes “Social meanings which are signalled by linguistic alternatives chosen by different groups of people within a community” (p. 1). Then she dwells on “*cultural* [italics hers] meanings expressed in both the symbolic sense of words and by the ways that interlocutors evaluate communicative behaviour” (p. 1). When the three channels of meaning making are consistently studied, Bonvillian contends in a Saussurean manner, “the apparent variation in speaking actually becomes systematic” (p. 1). The system of language apparently gives substance to society by defining it: “Consistent patterns of speech emerge in given situations, and consistent cultural norms are used to interpret communicative behaviour” (Bonvillian, p. 1). Thus human beings can be identified and categorized by their speech as enacted in behaviour and mannerisms, both on individual and community levels.

Arguing along similar lines, Jacques Lacan (1949) explains how an individual identity is shaped by language. Lacan also places language in a higher category. He uses the mirror metaphor to explain the identity process. Language is a mirror through which a child sees his or her resemblance to society. When an infant recognizes his or her image in a mirror, irrespective of his or her tender age, the child overcomes both human and material obstacles in order to edge closer to the mirror; s/he does this in order to get a closer look at his or her image. The mirror then is the language system that a child begins to pick up as s/he grows. The mirror stage represents the age at which a child begins to use the sounds of language. The ability to reproduce these sounds, though incoherently at first, is a triumphant period. It signifies the child's locating his or her identity within the society, the sounds of which he or she imitates. Lacan calls this first identity the "ideal I" (p. 406). This "I" gives shape to secondary identities that a child assumes as he or she grows up. There are social, cultural, economic, political and educational phantoms that dominate the individual and determine the identity that he or she assumes in different situations. Language highlights the different identities (Lacan, 1949). For people with colonial histories, colonization features as a colossal phantom in the formation of ideological identities, which the (former) colonizers persistently impose on the (former) colonized. In as much as people are connected to their language, there are intertwining effects of colonialism on the colonized and on the colonizer's language, not necessarily in that order.

It is worth noting that the child in Lacan's metaphor originates from Freud, and that the point is generally considered to apply more to male children than female ones. That highlights the marginalized histories of females in general over the centuries. Lauter

(1984) emphasizes the historical “otherness” of women when she writes: “Throughout history women and everything associated with the feminine have been relegated to second-class status” (p. 6). Lauter’s statement has double implications for women from the (former) colonized cultures who are subjected to both racial and gender oppression.

Julia Kristeva (1998) reiterates Lacan’s line of argument. She writes that individual identities are constantly called into question. Language manifests the different stages of identification that an individual undergoes. She terms the beginning the “semiotic stage” when a child’s means of communication is babbling. The babblings are the child’s attempt to imitate the sounds that society uses. At the babbling stage, the child is identifying with society into which he or she is born. The individual has to struggle in order to arrive at a social identity, at which stage he or she becomes capable of articulating meaningful sounds. Kristeva calls this the “symbolic stage”, the stage at which an individual uses linguistic symbols fluently. In other words, the symbols are equivalent to Saussure’s social systems, the conventions that guide the use of language.

Arguing in a manner similar to that of Saussure and Bonvillain, Ofelia Zepeda, another professor of linguistics (as quoted in Gurza, 2000), highlights the link between language and way of life: “Language is what makes people what they are” (p.1). Zepeda also believes that languages must be spoken else they die. Stressing the implications of her statement for Native American tribes, the languages of which are currently being spoken by a mere handful of elders, Zepeda continues: “When their generation dies, their language, their worldview and their way of life also disappear” (as quoted in Gurza, 2000, p.1). Zepeda’s statement also illuminates the bond between cultural groups and native languages. Her associating personal pronouns with the phrases “worldview” and “way of

life” presupposes reference to individual groups rather than clumping cultures. Thus specific languages serve as avenues to specific cultures. Consequently, if a language dies, its speakers’ access to the linguistic empowerment that would ordinarily be granted by that language, as Saussure probably advocates, is blocked. The loss is a cycle: Without language certain inherent features of a culture might neither be exhibited nor manifested by speakers; social empowerment is thus curtailed. Subsequently, such a society might not enjoy full representation amidst other cultures; their identity is threatened. With time, aspects of such a culture might be effaced or at best serve as occasional point of reference, as the contemporary use of Latin and ancient Greek illustrates. Zepeda, Saussure and Bonvillain make it rather difficult to separate speakers’ social identity from the culture that their language represents. Hence, the loss of a language invariably heavily detracts from certain constructed identities of speakers within the cultural context.

The scholars above highlight the point that an individual acquires his or her language from society. Every language is an organized system; an individual who speaks a particular language, therefore, is part of an organized system--a culture or a society. Being part of society means assuming an identity fundamental to the conventional structures of society, according to the linguistic signs of articulation, that is, as they are prescribed by society (Kristeva, 1998). Language thus provides the channel into the depths of a particular society or culture. The importance of language cuts across cultures and societies. Blair (1997) points out one implication of the loss of Canadian Aboriginal languages: “The loss of language means the loss of access to cultural capital, to a way of thinking and to many rich linguistic or cultural resources” (p. 7). Blair is referring to the current Canadian situation in which most native languages are neither spoken at home nor

taught in schools because English has become the dominant language. The overall effect is that most Aboriginal languages are dying because the younger generations cannot speak them. Leavitt (1993) explains that this has cultural implications: “The ascendancy of spoken English in native communities in Canada has threatened not only the oral native tradition, but also the survival of native languages” (p. 5). Barbara Burnaby (1986) stresses that losing a native language is a threat not only to the way a society thinks, but it has implications for their means of communication and the process of establishing their socio-cultural identity.

One way of explaining Leavitt’s point might be that different cultures manifest their ways differently; they also exhibit the differences among them through language. If a people’s language is taken away from them, they are forced to explain their ways through other people’s language. This situation puts the affected people in a conundrum. One cannot speak a language without being affected by its philosophies and principles, in other words, the underlying practices that the language manifests. If people are forced to express their ways through other languages, the chances are that they will eventually assimilate the current language--and its culture--rather than their primary language or indigenous cultures.

Writing from the United States, Agustin Gurza (2000) makes reference to “The American war against Indian languages [which] left a shameful legacy for which the government has barely begun to make amends” (p. 2). The statement has some relevance to Indian cultures as well. Elaborating on his assertion of “war”, Gurza cites one example in 1869 during which “a federal commission on Indian affairs linked much of the nation’s troubles not with the use of different languages but with ‘the proliferation of native

languages': "Their barbarous dialect should be blotted out and the English language substituted" (Gurza, 2000, p. 2). Inherent in this statement is the link between (native) languages and (native) practices or worldview of the Aboriginal people, which supposedly caused troubles for the United States. One may also consider (native) utterances as giving shape to (native) speakers' behaviour (Bonvillain, 1993), distinct from the mainstream American societies, for which distinctive native languages and ways were labelled "barbaric". Neither reasoning dissociates language and behaviour or ways of life. Incidentally, missionaries who worked with Canadian Aboriginals collaborated with governments to implement systems analogous to the conclusion that was reached by the U. S. Federal Commission in 1868. Perley (1993) writes: "The use of Aboriginal languages was discouraged and severely punished by the missionaries" (p. 123). Perley describes the situation of Aboriginals in Canada and the United States thus: "Aboriginal societies in both countries have experienced displacement due to ... forced assimilation and administrative mechanisms that control the affairs of the Aboriginal communities" (p. 120). A noteworthy point, however, is that the commission's comment and the missionaries' acts were both predicated by the current ideology.

Perley (1993) elaborates on the prevailing ideology that might have given way to expressions of disagreeable sentiments such as the ones above: "There were competing ideologies among European colonizers concerning Aboriginal people, and in so far as Aboriginal people were considered to be uncivilized, savage, barbarian, and backward, the roots for a ideology that would justify the domination of Aboriginal members...were established and developed in Canadian society" (p. 122). Perley is commenting on formed ethnocentric ideologies for which scholars sought justification in the sixteenth and

seventeenth centuries. Such reasoning was geared towards authenticating the racial and cultural suppression that had already been operating even before the Enlightenment era. Kant (1997) refers “graciously” to Canada and North America in his writings: “Among all the savages there is no nation that displays so sublime a mental character as those of North America.... The Canadian savage, moreover, is truthful and honest” (p. 56). Hegel (1997) offers a similar opinion about South America: “The Americans ...are like unenlightened children, living from one day to the next, and untouched by higher thoughts or aspirations” (p. 116). Hegel assumes an ethnocentric pose when he associates civilization with the immigrants who settle in North America: “Many Englishmen have settled there.... They bring with them all the advantages of civilization” (p. 117).

European contempt in the writings is not limited to Native Americans. Africans fare even worse from both writers’ judgement. Hegel offers: “Africa has no historical interest of its own, for...its inhabitants [live] in barbarism and savagery in a land which has not furnished them with any integral ingredient of culture” (1997, p. 124). Hegel further links Africa with infantile characteristics that make the continent a “prized” candidate for European patronage: “it is the land of gold forever pressing in upon itself, and the land of childhood, removed from the light of self-conscious history and wrapped in the dark mantle of night” (p. 124). Kant (1997) simply concludes that a black person has nothing intelligent to offer. Amidst such absolutism, a United States Federal Commission advocates blotting out the “barbarous dialect” (Gurza, 2000) of the natives and some missionaries in Canada prevent Aboriginal children from speaking Aboriginal languages. Obviously the issue goes farther than the act of speaking, especially if language determines people’s identities (Zepeda in Gurza, 2000). Aboriginal worldviews

would therefore be directly threatened by the war on Native North American languages. Two centuries before the Commission made its declaration in America, Louis XIV of France told the clergy of New France to civilize the aboriginal people by changing their religion as well as their traditional way of life (Perley, 1993). In another development, African cultures would be impacted such that certain ways would never revert to what they were before contact with European cultures (Mazrui, 1978). The onslaught on native languages would have direct implications for native cultures in North America and Africa.

That language seems to go hand in hand with socio-cultural identity appears to be acknowledged among cultures. Hence the need to take minority languages seriously cannot be overemphasized for former colonized subjects. Since African and Aboriginal languages are mostly oral ones, the need becomes even greater for speakers to stand up for their languages, at least for historical reasons. Oral languages fared badly in the initial clash between European and non-European cultures. Lack of documentation detracted from the linguistic status of oral languages. It was implied that oral languages could not perform the intellectual functions that written languages allowed their users to perform. In fact, Africans were not endowed with a language: "Africans were frequently portrayed ... as lacking not only civilization and writing, but language itself" (Richardson, 1994, p.160). Of their means of communication it is said: "[I]n so far as 'natives' made sounds to one another, theirs was 'a language of demonstrated emotion rather than of ideas and communication'" (p. 160). One is inclined to ignore the statement above until one reads Hegel, before the Enlightenment era, who accused "Negroes" of lack of understanding and Godly consciousness (Hegel, 1997). Then one begins to see further evidence of

ethnocentrism and racial prejudice that contributes in no small measure to the human degradation later heaped on Africans and other colonized cultures.

Indeed one might not even fully appreciate the racial implications of certain utterances in the Enlightenment age without going farther in history. That dichotomization of races has long been predicated on the binary notion of civilized/savage there is some proof. Emmanuel Eze juxtaposes Greek thought and Enlightenment ideology: "From a historical perspective, if we compare the European Enlightenment to Greek antiquity, we notice that in both the realms of philosophy and politics, the major thinkers of Greek antiquity articulated social and geographical human differences on the basis of the opposition between the 'cultured' and the 'barbaric'" (Eze, 1997, p. 4). Eze comments on Aristotle's definition of human beings. The latter supposed a human being to be a rational being, but this basically referred to "a Greek aristocratic male" (p. 4). Greek males constitute rational beings capable of reason and social organization--democratically. Non-Greeks were barbarians incapable of culture and "superior rational capacity" (p. 4) for Athenian principles; they "lived brutishly and under despotism" (p. 4). Eze continues that "European Enlightenment thinkers" not only retain the "Greek ideal of reason", they perpetuate "this reason's categorical function of discriminating between the "cultured" [currently identified as the civilized] and the "barbarian" [savage or primitive]" (p. 4). Of course, racial and cultural discrimination do not commence with the Greeks. Phillips (1985) informs his readers: "At one time or another slavery has touched practically every society" (p. 6). It can be perceived then that certain scholars in the Enlightenment age merely further the world history of colonization.

If the colonizer defines the colonized as the opposite of himself, the Negro lacking understanding and consciousness inversely endows the European imperialist with all understanding and natural consciousness, hence the justification to move in and colonize. Hegel (1997) calls slavery “the transition towards a higher stage of development” (p. 135). If one does not understand a language, one cannot have much use for that language; subsequently, one will not have the opportunity to appreciate the language’s inherent qualities. Yet that will not be sufficient grounds to conclude that the unknown language does not possess intellectual abilities. In fact, ignorance gives one valid reasons not to pass any judgement whatsoever. However, European explorers condemned African languages apparently because Europeans neither spoke nor understood African languages, hence, the assertion that Africans neither possess languages, nor could communicate ideas. When African languages were condemned, their cultures were indirectly condemned as well (Nichols, 1989).

That condemnation needs to be challenged and disproved in more ways than one; oral speakers themselves can better do that. The most effective way to do this is to learn to speak African oral languages very well, not for vengeful reasons, but for productive ones. Learning to speak oral languages will enable indigenous people to verify the aesthetic and linguistic qualities of such languages; then they might realize that oral languages are real channels of human communication for both intelligent ideas and emotions, because there is nothing wrong with expressing emotions. There is also the bonus of a second language for the former colonized. The legacy of the colonizer to the former colonies is the colonizer’s language; hence the former colonized goes through life with a primary and a secondary language. Access to different languages could help

prepare individuals to better deal with the socio-cultural identity crises that logically emanate from a world trying to negotiate multiculturalism with its associated multilingualism on a daily basis. The ascendance of English language--as well as other major languages—across the world implies that no culture or country enjoys monolingualism. Tulasiewicz and Adams (1998) conclude from their study of mother tongue in Europe: “Some linguistic pluralism exists in all countries, multilingualism being the most frequent companion of multinationalism” (p. 13). Logically, oral and/or minority languages must compete with the dominant world languages. Since most human beings pick up one another’s languages when they cohabit, since one cannot speak a language without eventually being influenced by the underlying principles of that language, it is to be expected that various language groups mingling must deal with the issue of shifting socio-cultural identities. The (former) colonized therefore have the double challenge of grappling with identity crises even as they attempt to prove the authenticity of oral languages, if they desire to remove some of the disdain heaped on oral languages during the encounter with the colonizer.

To pursue that, oral speakers need to fully grasp both content and aesthetic features that aid oral communication. Bown (1973) discusses content and art in oral languages: “When people talk of oral tradition in African literature they tend to talk in terms of content--proverbs, stories, histories--and forget the art of oratory itself” (p. 8). Alluding to African pride in the art of good speech, Bown recalls an eighteenth century English observer’s comment: “The people value themselves on their speaking, and some do not mistake their talent” (p. 8). At some point in history, oral speakers made the effort to blend both oral and written languages skills: “When English forms of public speaking

were introduced...Africans took up these forms against the background of their own tradition of oratory” (Bown, 1973, p. 8). Bown elaborates his point with prominent African figures who managed to use English language extremely well without discarding the art of oratory. Such efforts are worthy of emulation by contemporary generations who find the smooth blending of oral and written languages an elusive goal.

Christopher Miller (1990) highlights African verbal arts: “The verbal arts of Africa are as numerous and as varied as the peoples and cultures of the continent” (p. 72). Touching briefly on the complex systems of oral arts, Miller continues: “[the verbal arts encompass] sign systems that stretch and violate the Western categories of writing and speech” (p. 72). He gives further examples:

Among the more intriguing problems, one would want to study the use of proverbs in certain cultures that rely on them heavily; sign systems such as the brass weights made by the Asante to represent a proverb, as a kind of written version of it; the representation of words by their tone alone in the art of ‘talking drums’; and precolonial ideographic systems such as that found among the Ejagham of Cameroun and Nigeria.  
(Miller, 1990, p. 72)

That the African oral languages come in delicate forms is attested to by Miller’s assertions: “[T]he verbal arts in Africa tend to blur the distinction between absolute orality and absolute literacy” (Miller, 1990, p. 73). Perhaps oral languages initially present rather complicated challenges to European explorers, the easy way out being to gloss over them. Miller’s second assertion offers insight into some of the uses of the arts: “African verbal arts, even in an unspoiled traditional context, raise questions

concerning the structure of traditional societies and the manipulation of power in them” (p. 73). These two assertions should be enough motivation for oral speakers to want to learn their native languages. First, it will give them access to delicate language systems; second, it will endow them with rich knowledge of their cultural systems in precolonial periods, and what is left of them now, a most effective way to emphasize cultural identification. Miller’s argument can be redirected towards Native American languages and cultures.

Aboriginal languages possess similar linguistic delicacy; like African oral languages, Aboriginal verbal arts are very different from written ones. Leavitt states one difference between Aboriginal languages and English: “In native languages, such basic notions as the shape of concrete objects may be expressed in ways unfamiliar to speakers of English” (Leavitt, 1993, p. 7). Leavitt explains one such difference: “English ... speakers consider the shape of a basket or a tree limb (e.g. square or cylindrical) separately from the object itself” (p. 7). However, “in languages like Maliseet, ... speakers perceive shape as a property of the noun or verb denoting or referring to the object” (p. 7). Thus, according to Leavitt, one Maliseet verb *etutapskonuwat* is equivalent to the English sentence: “He or she has very chubby cheeks” (p. 7). Whilst the former encompasses subject, verb, adjective, and shape in a single utterance, the latter describes each part in a separate word. Leavitt’s example reinforces Miller’s argument for the delicate structure of some oral languages. Oral languages could present great challenges to learners.

However, that point is more easily stated than achieved; the reality is a predicament to some children of oral cultures. Oral languages emerge from oral cultures,

which are subject to certain dichotomization in everyday administration. Hirabayashi (1978) uses a sociologist's criteria to categorize ethnic groups cohabiting: "the size of the population of [a] group. and the power at the disposal of the group" (p. 50). Hirabayashi (1978) further uses the said sociologist's explanation of power and size to establish four categories of competing groups:

The one with the dominant size and the dominant power [becomes] the majority group. The one with small size but with dominant power [assumes] the elite position. The third category is the one with the dominant size but little power which [can be labelled] mass subjects. And finally, the grouping which is small in size and has little power [can be identified] as the minority group (Hirabayashi, 1978, p. 50).

The categories above can, at best, be taken subjectively if one proposes to use them for ethnic distinctions. The formal demise of European Imperialism and its accompanying geographical colonization has resulted in many countries around the globe acquiring sovereign status whilst bearing the label of former colonies. Somehow, such states currently exercise much independent power within their sovereign locations at least, when compared with the colonial era, noting that the colonizer never absolutely left the scene. On the international scene, however, the former colonizer maintains dominant status, at least when it comes to aspects such as language, entertainment, technology and commerce. In fact one success story of European Imperialism is the dominance of English, and to some extent, a few other languages in contemporary times. Tulasiewicz and Adams (1998) inform readers that English is referred to as "a world language" (p. 10). They further mention that Spanish or French is respectively

referenced as the ““second and third world languages”” (p. 10).

Whilst the categories above do not strictly apply to all situations involving Africans and Aborigines in juxtaposition with their European colonizers, the current situation in which English has become a universal language whereas oral languages enjoy territorial or ethnic prerogatives, at best, renders it appropriate to refer to English as a dominant language and oral languages as minority ones without disrespecting the latter in any way. Dominant and minority status of languages also apply to their respective cultures, hence the designation, dominant and minority cultures. In that sense either designation represents a carefully constructed system that empowers its society variously.

Whilst the young adults from minor cultures have urgent economic, educational, political and social reasons to invest in dominant languages, they can afford certain choices concerning their mother tongue, which generally fall under the category of minority languages. Tulasiewicz and Adams (1998) conclude: “Despite the influence of socio-political factors outside the user’s control in respect of the...language of communication, the choice of mother tongue, particularly in the domestic sphere, is entirely one’s own” (p. 12). Constraints notwithstanding, if young adults value their cultural identity, they have valid reasons to seriously consider their native languages. Interestingly, regard for the native language can be a shifting priority in one’s life at different stages. It could occur during childhood or adulthood. Hence, if one embarks upon (re)claiming one’s socio-cultural identity at every point in one’s life, and one approaches it with the required keenness, one can always recapture one’s identity, at least to some extent. However one cannot adopt the same attitude towards the basic

things in life; education, employment and the quest for sustenance often take precedence over issues of social-cultural identity. Accordingly, young adults from oral cultures often have the restricted alternative of investing in the medium that enhances their academic, economic and political prospects in the mainstream society, sometimes at the expense of their oral ethnicity. The consequences are that dominant languages continue to spread their tentacles whilst oral languages get lesser exposure both in mainstream interactions and within minor societies.

Both dominant and minority languages represent social systems, which need human investment to remain alive. Speakers of a language tend to be the lifelines of their respective socio-cultural systems. The worth of a system might therefore depend on how willing its language users are to invest in that system through constant use of the language. In other words, one effective way to undermine a cultural system would be to undersell its language. Nichols (1989) argues that modern colonization might have commenced on such a note: "If African languages could be seen as less significant than Western utterances, African culture could be seen as less significant" (p. 1). That statement turns languages from a mere communicative medium to a system highly susceptible to manipulation. Additionally, attitudes towards languages can have spill over effects onto their respective cultures. Moreover, world trends render dominant cultures greater force to reckon with while minority ones must continuously struggle to avoid being submerged. Young adults from former colonies might find Nichols's comment interesting when they are obliged to make certain communicative choices in their day-to-day interactions, for not only might they be opting for a language, they might also be grasping at a culture. Neither choice comes without one socio-cultural

implication or another.

### **Colonial Issues**

For the affected cultures, colonization was all but a fleeting experience. Mazrui (1978) rightly states: “Colonialism was not simply a political experience for Africa; it was even more fundamentally a cultural experience” (p. 23). He continues: “The values of the African world were profoundly disturbed by what would otherwise have been a brief episode in African history” (p. 23). The validity of this statement can be located in the fact that former colonized cultures are still grappling with the effects of imperialism and colonialism decades after the ending of formal colonialism<sup>3</sup>. However, the effects of colonialism are felt in diverse ways by the former colonized, and the colonizer too. One significant area in which former colonized cultures have suffered lies in the realm of oral languages. European perception of African languages upon contact with Africans is of special significance when considering Africans’ perception of their indigenous languages today.

That the process of colonization started from the premises of languages might not be a far-fetched statement. For a people to be completely submerged the way Africans were by European colonizers, the group with the upper hand needed “sterling” reasons to undertake their mission of cultural annexation. If “language makes people who they are” (Zepeda in Gurza, 2000, p. 1), then it would be strategic to ostracize a people’s human standards by first detracting from their language every vestige of human intelligence. From that perspective, slavery as well as colonization was the culmination of strenuous, calculated efforts to strip specific groups of one of the basic human endowments.

Ashton Nichols' (1989) study of nineteenth-century exploration narratives somewhat traces the development of colonization; it also highlights the underlying political as well as the social implications in the initial interaction between African and European cultures. The colonizer magnified his culture by trivializing African languages:

[N]ineteenth-century attitudes towards the native population of Africa produced interpretations centred on the verbal silencing of a potential source of power, the discrediting of any language use that might threaten a dominant authority, and the marginalization of silenced individuals because of their supposed lack of verbal sophistication. (1989, p. 1)

Ostracising African languages would be an effective means to silence the cultures inhabiting the continent. Language has the potential to either authenticate or invalidate a culture. Considering contemporary acknowledged bonds between language and worldviews, European explorers undermining African languages would be strategic in the complicated process of annexing oral cultures.

If language authenticates cultures it also empowers the individuals who make up various cultures. European explorers apparently sought to disempower Africans by taking away their language; to that effect they created a silencing environment by rendering Africans speechless: "European travellers characterized Africans in terms of silence or inarticulateness" (Nichols, 1989, p. 2). Nichols refers to a fourteenth century explorer's report: "African tribesmen have no speech, but rather grinning and chattering" (anonymous pamphlet, as quoted in Nichols, 1989, p. 2). The same pamphlet mentions "a people without heads" (p. 1); if "a people without heads" symbolized non-

intelligibility, it would not be difficult to connect it to the “grinning” and “chattering” Africans without speech. The combined expressions would create an image of imbecility, a condition that anticipates intervention by a higher intelligence, or to use Said’s (1994) words, render “ [Africans] problems to be solved or confined--or as the colonial powers openly converted their territory--taken over” (p. 207).

Nichols also reports of a “seventeenth-century chronicler, shipwrecked on the coast of South Africa” (p. 2), who claimed that for the five months that he spent on the coast, he never understood a word the people said. The chronicler supplied the reason he could not understand the Africans: “[T]heir speech is not like that of mankind” (D’Almada, as quoted in Nichols, 1989, p. 2). Apparently the quotations above are not isolated cases, for Nichols asserts: “This tendency to evaluate Africans in terms of the incomprehensibility of their language appears throughout many early narratives” (p. 2). People would hardly find foreign languages useful unless they understood such languages; hence, the explorers’ reaction to African languages would not be out of the ordinary if they had not mistaken *their* lack of understanding to mean that African languages lacked intelligence. Undoubtedly, Africans find European languages just as incomprehensible, but as to how baffled they might have been, their descendants may never fully discern, because the former, by the nature of their culture, lack the means to independently document their impressions of their visitors.

Perhaps the explorers did not find it worthwhile to probe African perception of European explorers; perhaps it was a deliberate attempt not to focus on recording African impressions of the early European visitors to the continent. In any case, most explorers’ accounts mainly present a one-sided account of Africans, mostly derogatory

ones (Nichols, 1989). Yet contemporary African generations must be grateful to the explorers for their accounts--even biased ones--which render it possible to link the present with the past. It should, however, not be overlooked that the relevance of documentation sometimes glosses the silencing force of writing. Silencing in this instance implies the double action of taking a people's language away from them and speaking--documenting--for them. Consequently, oral cultures "were spoken for" in spite of the fact that, by their nature, they ought to have spoken. The issue of colonized languages can best be appreciated in lieu of the acknowledged role language plays in human lives.

The importance of language in human lives cannot be overemphasized; again, Saussure (1916) underscores the intellectual processes of language. According to him, speech has both individual and social dimensions. It also implies an established system, an evolution, an existing institution and a product of the past. Saussure's definition of language is an inclusive one. It involves human speech and the social faculties that make speech possible. Language, for him, is a system of distinct signs corresponding to distinct ideas. These definitions imply that an individual's language consists of the sounds that he or she articulates, the conventions that guide articulation, as well as the institutions that determine these conventions. Saussure's definition of language presupposes that language users invariably possess intellectual abilities that enable them to master the arbitrary signs that constitute language systems. Mastery involves the double process of acquiring society's rules about language and using them to correspond intelligibly.

Similarly, Lacan (1949) links an individual's social identity to language. The

identification process begins at infancy. Language determines an individual's identity within society. According to Lacan, when a child recognizes his/her image, it overcomes all obstacles in order to edge closer to the mirror image. Lacan calls this the ideal identification stage. It is the beginning of the identification process. In the same manner, Kristeva (1998) describes the mirror stage as the symbiosis stage. During infancy a child babbles in imitation of sounds that society uses. Because the child babbles, nobody understands. At this stage the child does not have enough language to be considered a full member of society. The individual identity is taking shape; a defined identity is probable only when a child acquires linguistic fluency. Even then, one's identity is always subject to change. Both Lacan and Kristeva emphasize that identities change with situation or circumstances, and an individual has a particular identity that society allows him or her to have at critical moments. It is highly significant that language is closely linked with socio-cultural identity; in the colonial context, Africans and North American Aborigines have imposed on them condemning identities that would-be colonizers would allow them per their degraded languages.

Again the point is crucial for historical reasons. One needs to remember that the belief that oral cultures did not have languages and that the sounds they make for communication could not constitute languages was taken for a fact amongst some groups (Beattie, 1997; Richardson, 1994). If Africans had no language, they could not have any identity whatsoever. Neither could they have a culture nor constitute a society. The colonizer, by implication, then reduced the African to a sub-cultural level before moving to impose his culture on the African.

Ashton Nichols' (1989) study pinpoints that language played a vital role in the

institution of imperial rule. A major issue was and has continued to be orality as opposed to writing. On either side of this issue lurked the respective cultures of both colonizer and colonized. What differentiated the two cultures, respecting communicative mediums, shaped the binaries that play one culture against the other as colonialism unfolded. The binaries continue to play antagonistic roles between the (former) colonizer and the (former) colonized (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 2000). Apparently the difference between oral and written languages served as the origin of the controversy that eventually gives way to colonialism. One group assumed the upper hand upon the initial encounter between European explorers and Africans; the latter were simply deprived of meaningful voice (Nichols, 1989). If Africans were only capable of noise, they were probably not worth listening to: “[T]he myth of Africa evolved by relegating Africans--outsiders from the mainstream of the Western tradition--to a position of controlled silence within a verbal framework provided by Westerners” (Nichols, 1989, p. 1). The myth was created and perpetuated by Europeans. Creating and perpetuating the African myth would not be a thorny issue because one party only documented the events of history.

The unfairness of the early scenario is evident in more ways than one: Europeans evaluate Africans on the basis of European languages and cultures. Not only are Africans clueless about the culture that is being used to evaluate them, but they are also being judged by a people who are complete strangers to the African cultures they are passing judgement on. Inasmuch as the colonizer passes judgement on cultures he has not adequate understanding of, hence effectively marginalizing them, he also paves the way for unborn generations to critique his penchant for xenophobia. Europeans do not

know enough about Africa nor its cultures to pass judgement on them; in fact, they do not know much about the continent. Kant (1997) comments that European visits to the African continent are not motivated by anthropological reasons: “The coast of African is in fact visited by Europeans; but these journeys are very violent because Europeans carry away each year between 60,000 and 80,000 Negroes to America” (p. 59). He continues: “Thus it has come to pass that even up until modern times hardly 30 miles from the coast into the interior of the continent is known to Europeans” (p. 59). From a people who have not given themselves enough access to the interior of the African continent, convenient conclusions about the race that inhabits it are surprisingly prolific, judging from explorers’ accounts (Nichols, 1989). One such writer describes the continent as “cloaked in the mantle of night” (Hegel, 1997). A more interesting point however is the fact that Hegel and other contemporaries did not travel to Africa; they had access only to explorers’ writings yet were content to make serious ethnocentric assertions against the inhabitants of the continent (Hegel, 1997; Jefferson, 1997). It would be interesting to find out how much attitudes have changed towards African and oral languages in general but this time from the viewpoint of Africans.

Including the (former) colonized in the on-going colonial discussion is essential in view of the fact that colonization was not initiated and implemented entirely by the colonizers. Abramova (1979) traces the history of the Transatlantic slave trade from the fourteenth century in which Africans played just as crucial a role as Europeans in starting the human trade. Clarkson (1999) uses an African persona to create emotional scenarios of the prominent roles Africans variously play in the capture and subsequent transportation of fellow Africans to Europe and the Americas. Thus a balanced

critiquing of past slave activities must be done from the perspectives of both Africans and Europeans. Similarly, a fair criticism of the after-effects of slavery or colonization can only be done by considering the stance of both (former) colonizer and the (former) colonized, language not exempted (Bahri, 1996).

Of particular interest are the attitudes of the former colonized towards their native languages. At this juncture, the focus is on the former colonized ones, who might play down oral languages, because they do not hold the same power as dominant ones. If learning one language imposes fragmentation on an individual's sense of identity, dealing with competing ones, with the scales heavily tilted in favour of one, could create a real dilemma to the socio-cultural identities of former colonized subjects. In a multi-cultural environment where languages are labelled dominant and minority and where prestige is continually linked with the former, with the result that it dominates major areas of communication, the task of decolonising by focussing on native minority languages is a herculean one. The step to decolonize must be taken by the former colonized themselves. In other words, the decision to cherish native minority languages, regardless of their lack of seeming social lustre and prominence, could constitute the basic affirmative action of minority cultures to initiate their presence in a multi-cultural world.

Some young adults from former colonies opt for dominant languages for economic, prestige and social reasons. Such young adults become the (post)colonial agencies by default if they fail to strive for balance between dominant and minority languages. If one's native language is closely linked with social and cultural identities (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 2000), exclusive preference for the dominant cultures is tantamount

to divorcing one's basic identity. If individuals from minority cultures prefer dominant languages and cultures, it is necessary to examine their actions in the light of the ongoing post-colonial and multi-cultural discussions. The problem is one of individual perception or lack of it: If Europeans denigrated oral languages in the past, an act which in part contributed to colonization and imposition of dominant languages, if certain former colonized people currently slight oral languages, they perpetuate colonization. The paradox therein is that the former colonized who disregard their mother tongue inadvertently help to centre dominant languages and thereby (re)initiate their own marginalization. Consequently, it is necessary to examine both individual and institutional positions in order to attain a fair view of the issues confronting post-colonial discourse and to work for balance in handling both dominant and minor languages.

An individual born into a society internalizes that society and grows up as a product of its culture. Upon growing up the individual can make certain choices regarding his or her culture. An individual can wittingly or unwittingly opt for a dominant culture; conversely, a dominant culture can superimpose itself on minority cultures and destabilize the cultural identities of the inhabitants. Such a situation occurred during the European Imperial era. Imperial states imposed their cultures on oral cultures under the pretext that the oral culture was inferior. The formal ending of colonialism ought to have ushered in a post-colonial world (Boer, 2002); it should be evident to all that dominant cultures are not superior to oral ones. However, world issues are not that easily straightened out. Colonialism persists in subtle forms despite the formal ending of geographical colonization. The situation could be worse. Phillips (1985) writes, "Slavery proper exists today" (p. 3). The overall implications of Phillips'

statement cannot be adequately dealt with in this study. Yet it ought to be noted, for the purposes of this study, that slavery transcends the ordinary physical experience; currently, it also assumes intellectual and theoretical dimensions (hooks, 1998). Hence, if individuals from minority cultures choose to align themselves with dominant cultures by disregarding their ethnic identities, because they associate sophistication and enlightenment with dominance, they perpetuate colonial patterns in a (post)colonial world. That qualifies for a form of psychological and/or theoretical slavery. Such individuals then become post-colonial agents through whom colonialism continues to manifest itself. Under such circumstances colonialism becomes a negotiated venture. For the implicated individuals, “imperialism is never the imposition of one view on another. It is a contested and joint experience” (Said & Barsamian, 1994, p. 73). It is vital that individuals progressively examine their perceptions on socio-cultural issues in order to avoid being colonial machinery. A stable ethnic identity could be a strong aid in resisting colonial tendencies.

### **The Aboriginal Language Situation in Canada**

If language provides access to the core of society and culture, understandably, the loss of Aboriginal languages is a major source of concern to Aboriginal scholars in Canada. Considered a major avenue to a culture, the loss of a language spells the extinction of the culture such language represents. History has proved that languages die when they are not regularly spoken (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998). Zepeda (as quoted in Gurza, 2000) uses the life-cycle metaphor to allude to the mortality of language: “Just as language is born, so can it die” (p. 1). Zepeda’s comment could further illustrate Saussure’s theory of empowerment. Aside from language having a beginning, it could

be assumed that the birth of a new member to a society infers the re-birth of its language because there is another member to carry on the heritage of that society. That theory, however, only holds so far as members continue to utilize their language. If a particular society opts for a secondary language or is made to choose between its indigenous language and a secondary language, the demise of the affected language is put in place. That appears to have happened to Aboriginal languages in North America over the past centuries. Formal education has played a fundamental role in endangering Aboriginal languages.

One writer describes Aboriginal education in Canada as internal colonialism (Perley, 1993). Perley explores the current ideology that Aboriginal people perform poorly academically. Sections of Canadian mainstream society consider academic success the hallmark of advancement (Frideres & Reeves, 1993). From that premise, Aboriginal people are not advancing because, comparatively, they are not doing well in academic pursuits. Various attempts to unearth the reason behind the poor performance of Aboriginal people have identified Aboriginal culture as the obstacle to Aboriginal advancement (Perley, 1993). Some Aboriginal scholars, however, think that the educational system in Canada is the reason behind the poor academic performance.

Classical colonialism, according to Perley (1993), refers to geographical domination of cultures by an external unit. Geographical domination goes hand in hand with economic, political, racial and cultural imposition. The colonizer thus exploits the colonized from all angles. Internal colonialism is an offspring of classical colonialism. The situation has emerged from conflicting internal politics of former colonies. Opposing groups emerge after independence; dominant groups oppress minor ones, the

colonizer assumes different faces (Highlights, 2002). The model applies to all old colonies, but political circumstances differ from one colony to another. The model also applies to the Canadian educational system. Aboriginals were initially regarded as heathens needing to be led to salvation. To pursue their mission of deliverance, missionaries were instructed to encourage Aboriginals to adopt the superior culture of French, and reject everything Aboriginal (Haig-Brown, 1988; Perley, 1993). In short, Aboriginals were to be assimilated into the “superior” culture, a process Miller (1996) also refers to as “the euthanasia of savage communities” (p. 75).

The ideology that European cultures are superior to that of the Aboriginal cultures eventually culminated in a segregated system of schooling for Aboriginal children, at which schools there are calculated efforts to “civilize” Aboriginal children (Haig-Brown, 1988; Hookimaw-Witt, 1998). A major avenue for the planned assimilation was the establishment of residential schools (Frideres & Reeves, 1993; Miller, 1996). Missionaries who managed the schools also considered Aboriginals naïve; consequently, they sought to protect Aboriginal children from the “corrupt white” (Perley, 1993, p. 123), as well as from the poor influence of their communities, and especially from the influence of their parents and elders. The predominant language in the established schools was that of the colonizers: “The use of Aboriginal languages was discouraged and severely punished by the missionaries” (Perley, 1993, p. 123). Apparently, formal education did not do much for Aboriginal languages; the current decline of these languages is the result of the educational system that began operating in the seventeenth century (Haig-Brown, 1988; Miller, 1996).

Hookimaw-Witt (1998) opines that there have not been any major changes in the

school curriculum structure since residential schools. She writes: “[T]he destruction of our culture during the residential school period has continued, because our children are still educated away from their culture” (p. 165). She also believes that Aboriginals do not have much participation in designing curricula. An exploitative element runs through the history of Aboriginal education. There have been some changes (Haig-Brown, 1988; Highlights, 2002; Miller, 1996). The residential school system is generally considered a failure, since it failed to achieve the Euro-Canadian objective of cultural assimilation: “[E]ducation in residential schools would prove the means ‘of wiping out the whole Indian establishment’” (Miller, 1996, p. 185). Yet, residential schools did impact negatively on Aboriginal students who went through the system in Canada (Haig-Brown 1988), thus helping to further the marginalization of Aboriginal cultures. The negative effects notwithstanding, both Haig-Brown (1988) and Miller (1996) discuss the reasons for the failure of residential schools. Both writers also comment on Aboriginal peoples’ aptitude for passive resistance, a form of silent defiance, as one strong reason for the failure of the residential school system in Canada.

By the statements above, Hookimaw-Witt is referring to the absence of school curriculum, which incorporates important aspects of the Aboriginal cultures as well as the failure of Canadian authorities to let Aboriginal people design the school curriculum for Aboriginal children. The result of this marginalization process has been Aboriginal hostility and apathy towards an educational system that imposes itself on the people. Perley (1993) suggests a solution: “Education, therefore, has to be decolonized if improvements are to be made in the education of Aboriginal people” (p. 125). There are similar calls by Aboriginal scholars in Canada. The language imposition that began in

the seventeenth century has resulted in the current situation where Aboriginal languages are dying because the people can no longer speak the languages. Forcing Aboriginal students to abandon their native languages has resulted in a situation where successive generations have acquired fluency in the colonizers' languages, to the detriment of their native languages. Blair (1997) explains: "one of the signs of the gradual death of a language is when young people are more fluent in English and acquire only minimal proficiency in their indigenous language, if at all" (p. 4).

The languages are dying because some parents do not speak their native languages at home. Some of these parents are the products of the residential schools of the past compelled to speak the colonizer's language only. Consequently, they can neither speak nor teach their children their native languages. It appears that both parents and children have had to adopt new languages. For example, Frideres and Reeves (1993) report: "[A]bout 42% of Native children entering schools have English as their mother tongue with no working knowledge of a mother tongue" (p. 44). For such students, a part of their cultural heritage is lost before they enter school; the effect of total immersion in a dominant culture only further alienates them from their native cultures. Their ethnic identity is involved: "Our Aboriginal languages and culture contain the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors, and it is critical that we examine the inherent concepts in our lexicon to develop understanding of the self in relation to existence" (Ermine, 1995, p. 104). The language situation clearly surpasses the mere act of speaking native languages. It encompasses the depths of culture; it symbolizes access to particular ways of knowing and the pride of belonging to a particular society. Most importantly, it signifies the preservation of such cultures. The Aboriginal has a role to

play. The issue then is whether (oral) speakers are proud and bold enough to speak the languages that shape and explain their cultures, minority or otherwise.

The language situation has implications for a (post)colonial world too. The ordinary practice in bilingual educational systems is to teach pupils in their mother tongues in the lower primary grades. When they get to the upper grades, the means of instruction is switched to English or whichever dominant language operates in the system. For example, in Ghana, grades one to three are taught in the vernacular. Pupils have English lessons; also, certain subjects like science and social studies are taught in both vernacular and English. When pupils get to grade four, they are taught in the English language, depending on the language competence of the class. Situations vary from one school to another.

Frideres and Reeve (1993) desire a similar implementation in Aboriginal schools; they propose the language switch to be done after grade six, but Aboriginals do not have such distinct provisions. What is worse, only a few schools have Amerindian language programmes. The two scholars further report: "Generally the student attending school is subjected to a submersion approach in which the student is forced to take on English /French and give up his/her mother tongue" (p. 45). The situation as described above somewhat reflects the case of language imposition in the residential schools. In some cases, the school situation, as described by Frideres and Reeve, might even give substance to Hookimaw-Witt's labelling of education in Canada as indigenous colonization. She states that the social and economic situation of Native Canadians cannot be improved by the imposition of an educational system that teaches a different and "supposedly superior or more developed culture" (p. 169). Apparently, teaching

children primarily through a second language does not authenticate their primary cultures to the desired appreciable degrees.

Arguing from an apparent post-colonial point of view, Hookimaw-Witt suggests that there is the need to refine education. Education replicates society. There are different societies. The idea that one society should determine the needs of others does not augur well for social harmony: “people who are called minorities or marginal still have the right to determine their own fate” (p. 169). This is a good argument for (post)colonial theory. However, individuals from minority cultures need to reconsider their attitudes too. Each society needs to constantly re-evaluate its position in order to ensure that it is not replicating colonialism. This study focuses on individuals from African and Aboriginal cultures, a people who have been colonized before. Such people need to resist colonial tendencies in any form. It is easy to accuse dominant cultures of language, educational, political and cultural imposition. An introspective analysis might help to ascertain whether the former colonized resist or replicate certain colonial patterns. That is a major focus of my study.

### **Proverbs**

In attempting to establish the relevance of proverbs to languages and to society in general, intellectuals have fashioned diverse definitions which seek to capture the permeating nature of proverbs. A few such definitions that emphasize the intellectual characteristics of proverbs are considered in this study. The main focus, however, is the inherent usefulness of proverbs, which renders them infinitely intimate with languages (Erasmus, 1540/1982).

It is probably the link proverbs have with languages that leads Andra Thakur, a

contemporary scholar to write that “proverbs are universal” (“A Scholar”, 2001). Madu (1992) has an interesting definition: “Simply, a proverb is condensed wisdom drawn from experience” (p. 190). Erasmus (1540/1982) quotes ancient scholar Donatus’ definition, which agrees with Madu’s contemporary definition: “A proverb is a saying ... which is fitted to things and times” (Erasmus, 1540/1982, p. 3). In principle, Donatus’ ancient definition of proverbs is similar to contemporary ones: “[A proverb is a] succinct and pithy saying in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs” (Proverb, 2001). The Igbos of Nigeria have a proverb that aptly defines the role of proverbs in language: "Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten" (African Arts, 2001). Among the Igbos, most native dishes are prepared with palm oil, cooking oil extracted from the palm tree. To appreciate the last definition, therefore, one needs to bear in mind the relevance of palm oil to Igbo dishes. Recognizing that palm oil is a staple among the Igbos helps to appreciate the Igbo definition of proverbs.

In the New Oxford Dictionary of English, Pearsal (1999) defines a proverb as “a short pithy saying in general use, stating a general truth or a piece of advice” (p.1492). Erasmus (1540/1982) further argues that it is no coincidence that “the most learned and eloquent” (p. 12) writers make use of proverbs in their works. Among the learned Greeks, Aristotle, Theophrastus through the scholarly Romans, Varro to Christ, proverbs are used to teach moral and practical lessons, lessons that have usually turned out to be universal. Perhaps, one genuine reason for their effectiveness is that proverbs appear to have served as modes of teaching throughout the times. Admirably, however, they never seem to lose their fervour nor didacticism: “If a motive is to be found in reverence for antiquity, there appears to be no form of teaching which is older than proverbs”

(Erasmus 1540/1982, p. 13). The ancient nature of proverbs, while in no way undermining their usefulness, rather renders them omniscient. Proverbs seem to move with the times; hence, they come in the form of experiences, shaped into compressed sayings, that have either served or harmed previous generations. Adherence to the underlying principles works to one's benefit. Logically, then, all languages and cultures continue to employ proverbs: "Proverbs are part of every spoken language and are related to such other forms of folk literature as riddles and fables that have originated in oral tradition" (Proverbs, 2001).

There is always room for improvement in one civilization or another; hence, heeding the valuable advice embedded in proverbs, and especially applying the underlying principles, might go a long way to improve human relationships. There is an effective means to ensure that one learns from the past in order to improve the present for a better tomorrow. For this reason, this study explores some implications of proverbs in both oral and written languages. A point will have been made in the end if it is observed that, through proverbs, oral and written languages can share meaning. By way of exploring participants' knowledge about proverbs, this study reviewed the ancient proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge". The task was to locate the proverb in English, Twi, Kalenjin and Cree, examine the source from which each language formulates the proverb and the lessons--moral, social and practical--each professes to teach. Undoubtedly, there are semantic and other differences, but that is the underlying rationale. The study examines whether three different languages can, from different angles, utilize one proverb to teach similar lessons about life. This may help to redefine differences. Instead of perpetuating the

antagonism among cultures, differences might be viewed as complementary routes to acquiring knowledge about the world in which we live.

Ngugi defines human differences in terms of “borders”. According to him people usually associate borders with divisions, but there is a more productive alternative to the common notion:

[I]f a border marks the outer edge of one region, it also marks the beginning of the next region. As the marker of an end it also functions as the marker of a beginning. Without the end of one region, there can be no beginning of another. Depending on our starting point, the border is both the beginning and the outer edge. Each space is beyond the boundary of the other. The border in between serves as both the inner and the outer of the other. It is thus a boundary and a shared space.

(Ngugi, 2000, p. 120)

Looking on differences as shared phenomena rather than a weapon for patronage is one notion that might have spared both the ancient and the modern worlds the unpleasant experience of colonization. Interestingly, it is a notion yet to be fully grasped by the contemporary world despite witnessing the dismal effects of colonization. If young adults from the former colonized cultures could grasp that notion, they might be able to handle the differences ably and construct definite identities within their native cultures whilst simultaneously identifying with dominant cultures. They may examine how oral languages perform the same didactic roles as written ones; they may explore avenues to acquire dual lenses that might enable viewing both languages in more complementary terms. Then they might devote to oral languages/cultures as equally as they invest in

dominant languages/cultures.

### **Postcolonial Perspectives**

When post prefixes colonial, semantically it presupposes a definite crossing point from the colonial era into a time period which has left issues of the marginalization or the decentring of one group by another behind (Gandhi 1998; Bahri, 1996). The expression might make one anticipate the centralization of the former decentred; subsequently, one might be (mis)led into expecting equal focus on both dominant and minor cultural groups (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000). Moreover, various questions raised by liberal theories such as postmodernism, (post)feminism and the impact made by other such theories as Marxism and post structuralism might equally proffer the strong possibility of tangible strides towards equal representation, for both dominant and minority cultures, at least within the realm of (post)colonialism (Boer, 2002; Gandhi, 1998). Additionally, a postcolonial concept might presuppose that sweeping changes have occurred for the (former) colonized, that the once marginalized can currently occupy the centre and have as strong a voice as that of the former colonizer (Seshadri-Crooks, 2000). Granted, colonialism has had implications for the imperialist as it has for the culturally suppressed. Neither past conqueror nor the past conquered have emerged from the colonial processes unscathed. Each has had to give something of his/her culture and might inadvertently have also picked something from the other; that is also natural when cultures or people cohabit (Harrington Palethorpe & Watson, 2000). Much as tangible changes have occurred in certain areas, certain issues have barely changed over the years (Simonse, 1982); hence, one wonders where colonization ends and where new theories such as postcolonial studies begin to impact on processes that aim to counter

past colonial deeds (Gandhi, 1998; Bahri, 1996).

Subsequently, the prefix “post” is shrouded in ambiguity, some of which has been lengthily discussed by Shohat (2000). Shohat refers to the “disorienting space of the post-colonial” (p. 130), amongst others, that necessitates a constant verification as to whether the “post” indicates the perspectives and location of the ex-colonized, the ex-colonizer, the ex-colonial settler or the displaced hybrid in First World metropolitans” (p. 130). From that perspective, Shohat barely leaves a party out of her “post-colonial” discussion. She writes: “Since most of the world is now living after the period of colonialism, the post-colonial can easily become a universalising category...” (p. 131). She also refers to the “lack of historical specificity in the ‘post’” (p. 130).

Locating the postcolonial period is a complex issue. Shohat (2000) writes that “Colonial-settler states” (p. 131) in the Americas, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa mostly gained independence from Britain in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One can also refer to freed Africans who played instrumental roles in the fight to end the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; one prominent advocate, Olaudah Equiano<sup>4</sup>, played no less a crucial role in the fight to abolish slave trade. There is also the ambiguous position of the (former) colonized whose lives have become intrinsically linked with the (former) colonizer through Western education (Shohat, 2000; Lee, 1992; Edwards, 1990). Independence for colonies in Africa and Asia spans the twentieth century, compounding the difficulty in locating the commencement of the postcolonial period. One must never lose sight of the political undercurrents of the (post)colonial concept (Shohat, 2000).

The reign of the (former) colonizers’ language heightens the complexity in

locating a postcolonial period. Currently there are hardly any geographical colonies that the (former) colonizer possesses, yet the language of the colonizer has remarkable dominance in worldwide communication (Tulasiewicz & Adams 1998). Commerce, entertainment, politics, formal education, to name four, are mostly conducted in one dominant language or another, from one continent to another. Using the colonizers' languages has crucial implications for the former colonized; it ensures that the ties between the former colonizer and the former colonized grow stronger. And it also makes it possible for the former to maintain the upper hand. Between Britain and the former colonies, English is the common medium. Considering that the European Empire once colonized 85% of the world (Bahri, 1996), and Britain commanded an appreciable number of colonies, the estimation of non-native speakers who might currently utilize English, thereby promoting the language, might be considerably higher.

Language has remained a vital force to reckon with because of its key role in all levels of human interaction. Ngugi (2000) asserts: "Language is of the utmost importance" (p. 122). That importance has not always applied to all languages. In the past certain languages have been decisively given more value than others; language, at a point in the past, pertained to a particular tongue rather than encompassing all spoken media (Nichols, 1989). Geographical colonization would be a dual process of territorial and communicative imposition. Practically, the colonizers would need language for any kind of administration; they might have been ruling the colonized cultures yet, the colonizers could not speak the languages of the ruled. The simple remedy would be to operate through the colonizers' language. Hence, the successful take over of the colonies goes hand in hand with the triumph of the colonizer's language(s). Yet, the latter has

actually outlived the former. African writings illustrate the statement that the imperialist's language has outlived the imperialist's conquests.

Simonse (1982) argues: "Until the time when a large number of French and British colonies in Africa attained independence, around 1960, the concept of *African literature* was unknown" (p. 451). About two decades after independence, Simonse could write: "Today this concept has been widely accepted" (p. 451). Simonse's definition of *African literature* immediately highlights the colonizers' language: "It refers to an ever-increasing collection of novels, poetry, and drama written by African authors in, usually, the languages of the former colonial powers" (p. 451). Nichols (1989) refers to "a parallel discourse in a wide range of African languages" that developed whilst "the Western discourse of domination was asserting its authority" in Africa (p. 19). Writing in the same decade as Simonse, Nichols (1989) also affirms: "Only in recent years has that discourse made itself felt in the Western world" (p. 19). The significance of that discourse to (post)colonial theory can be glimpsed in Nichols' statement: "The writings of Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Emecheta, Amadi, Armah, p'Bitek, Lo Liyong, Soyinka, and others, have finally given words to voices that had been silenced for over a century" (p. 19). Like Simonse, Nichols alludes to the hold the colonizer's language has on African writing: "Ironically, this legacy has become available only by being written in or translated into English" (p. 19). Thus the triumph of the colonizer's language has subtly sustained the reign of European imperialism (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). The colonizer's language remains long after the colonizer's term of office in the former colonies has ended: "Major world languages are increasingly being used for commerce and international communication in countries in

which they are neither the original mother tongue nor an additional regional language...” (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998, p. 10).

However, in contemporary times that dominance is highly negotiated; English is rated dominant because it is spoken by a vast majority of world speakers, a good number of whom might come from former colonies. Coming from a former colony mostly implies that one has native claim to a language other than whichever dominant one might operate in one’s native country. Non-native English speakers, who grow up in non-English cultural environments, can only learn English through their native language and learn about English culture via their native worldviews. Upon attaining an appreciable level of fluency, such speakers may still exhibit communicative differences through aspects such as pronunciation, accent and vocabulary. Accordingly, English might be a “first language” (Tulasiewicz & Adams 1998, p. 10), yet it is the language that probably boasts of the largest variety in contemporary times, largely because foreign speakers adopt it to suit their geographical, and cultural environments.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1982) offer some insight into the adaptiveness of English, for example, lack of case-endings and the flexibility with which new words are formed. English is of “patently mixed nature” (p. 9). Its association with “Germanic wordstock, stress pattern, word-formation, inflection and syntax” coupled with similar elements from “a classical and Romance word stock” increase the fluctuations that rise with the use of English among both scholars and the unlearned (Quirk & Greenbaum, p. 9). Yet the existence of current varieties of English language is not the results of its mixed origins alone; it is also largely due to foreign users adapting it to suit their native environments. In that regard something probably needs to be said for the versatility of

the English language; it has maintained its Englishness amidst such multiplicity. Quirk and Greenbaum maintain: “The degree and acceptance of a single standard of English throughout the world, across a multiplicity of political and social systems, is a truly remarkable phenomenon” (1982, pp. 3-4). By “standard” Quirk and Greenbaum refer to certain core elements such as grammar, syntax, wordstock and spelling which are manifested in all the varieties, with minimal differences from one geographical location to another. Paradoxically, the language that dominates most is simultaneously the most negotiated communicative medium. By contrast, the French have managed to make their language quite compact (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998).

Foreign adaptation has probably contributed to the emergence of varieties of English, though no language has stability: “All societies are constantly changing their languages with the result that there are always coexistent forms” (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1982, p. 9). For the English language, this has dual implications; whereas its native speakers might gradually introduce changes to the language through migration, social and educational factors, foreign users also introduce new elements to the English language, thus speeding up the change processes. Whether the changes are initiated by natives or foreign speakers or social forces, the end results are conspicuous; sometimes they show up in unexpected ways. A recent study by three researchers in Australia has shown that the queen of England’s “[English] is moving subtly along with the times” (Harrington et al., 2000, p. 927). The study, which compares the monarch’s recent speeches with her older ones from the past decades, shows the queen’s speech as departing from the polished accent of the aristocrat towards that used by “speakers ...younger and or lower in the social hierarchy” (p. 297). The researchers compare

vowels in the queen's Christmas messages in the 1950s with those of the 1980s. They further juxtapose the compared vowels with recordings of female broadcasters of the British Broadcasting Corporation, which they use as the "model for a standard southern accent" (p. 927). The juxtaposition enables the researchers to "determine that the queen's vowels in her Christmas messages have moved towards but not attained [the southern] accent" (p. 927). The findings of the research might have implications for (post)colonial discussions.

While the study indicates a shift from the Queen's standard way of speech, the researchers are not reading socio-cultural regression into the changes occurring in the monarch's tongue. They see it rather as a normal trend: "The pronunciation of all languages changes subtly over time, mainly owing to the younger members of the community" (p. 927). In fact the researchers' conclusion indicates that by the changes in her accent, the monarch has managed to move closer to the lower classes whilst managing to maintain her social echelon: "We conclude that the queen no longer speaks in the queen's English of the 1950s, although the vowels of the 1980s Christmas messages are still clearly set apart from those of a standard southern-British accent" (p. 927). Pronunciation is but one aspect of language, just as the example of the queen might be an isolated one, yet this is an indication that the monarch, representative of the old colonizers, is part of the metropolitan struggle to maintain certain intrinsic aspects crucial to the identities of individual cultures.

The Queen of England's accent would originally symbolize her Englishness, in addition to projecting her as an English aristocrat. While she can be expected to go through communicative changes like everybody else, she might also desire to keep

something of her tradition or culture. Thus while the changes in her accent might indicate a closer alignment to lower society, the remnants of her accents that set her apart is also crucial to her socio-cultural identity. On that premise, the former colonized are not the only groups struggling to maintain aspects of their cultures; the (former) colonizer is also undergoing cultural turbulence the magnitude of which might not be easily ascertained due to the acquired reputation of an imperialist. Contrary to Mazrui's (1973) assertion, colonization has affected both colonizing and colonized cultures.

The linguists' study underscores socio-cultural and political transformations taking place in mainstream societies. Institutions that have previously enjoyed privileged positions are no longer occupying such comfortable positions. Researchers Harrington, Palethorpe and Watson (2000) indicate that "standard accent of British English--known as Received Pronunciation--has also moved with the times" (p. 927). They supply the reason behind this move: "This has partly been the result of young people rejecting it because of its association with the [social structures]" (p. 927). In a way, that assertion indicates that changes in social ideologies or the quest for social restructuring can also provoke changes in the native language. The changes occurring in the English monarch's accent might well be a microcosm of the wave of changes sweeping across (post)colonial cultures in the world. If the assertion that the queen of England's pronunciation is changing due to resistance from the lower ranks of the society is accurate, then the language issue involves the imperialist just as it affects the colonized, albeit from different angles. It also maximizes the controversy of the (post)colonial era. The queen's native language dominates the world: "English is the most international of languages" (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1982, p. 9); Tulasiewicz and Adams (1998) classify

English as “a world language” ( p. 10). Yet the “Queen’s English” is losing some of its sophisticated tilt that separates her from the lower classes. In effect, what makes the Queen “first class” is also closing the gap between her and the lower ranks. And that might be due to younger generations resisting social structures, even if such resistance originates with the colonizer’s own children. In view of recent criticisms of the English monarchy, especially by younger English generations, the changes occurring in the Queen’s tongue could also be a strategy on her part to recapture affection for her and the monarchy. Either way, the irony cannot be lost on scholars who are interested in both language and colonial issues. There is a blurring of the ‘centre’ and the ‘margins’. A simple image of dominance or binaries of the dominating culture as against the dominated is rather difficult to project.

Some cultural groups from former colonies have to grapple with the marginalization of their languages whilst others are compelled to initiate moves that would save their indigenous languages from extinction (Bonvillain, 1993; Miller, 1990; Ngugi, 2000). For either group the price has been the loss of aspects of their indigenous languages, primarily due to contact with the colonizer, and secondly due to the complex outcomes of that contact. Considering that most languages belonging to the former colonies are labelled minority, thus contrasting the dominant status of the colonizer’s language, one might expect speakers of minority languages to be the only ones involved with current attempts to save the entire or relevant aspects of their native languages. Thus the news that the Queen of England is also losing some of the accent that distinguishes her as an aristocrat comes as rather ironic. Unlike the former colonies, the Queen of England might not need to engage in formal cultural efforts to rediscover her

pronunciation. Yet, the loss in her accent, minimal though it might be, theoretically places the monarch within the socio-cultural struggle to salvage indigenous language and subsequently preserve such cultures. This reiterates the point that one cannot always be explicit about the 'centre' and the 'margins', since the colonizer and the colonized can, depending on the issue at stake, occupy both spaces simultaneously.

While the Queen of England might be losing something of the communicative aura that sets her apart from other speakers of English, some secondary speakers celebrate the changes that have brought them closer to the former imperialist. Ken Noskiye is a Canadian Aboriginal journalist who appreciates the chance to use the English language. He writes: "Of all the gifts Europeans brought to our land, the greatest has to be the English language" ("Education, Creativity," 2001). From Noskiye's point of view the intermingling of cultures has possibly not yielded only negative effects; there have been positive impacts. He can afford to be complimentary because he belongs to the former colonized who have managed to grasp both secondary and primary languages (Bown, 1973). Noskiye admits: "I have been lucky that I have been able to retain my First Nation language, but I also adopted the new language to transfer my stories onto paper" (p. 11). Like the Queen, people such as Noskiye are important to (post)colonial discussions. A product of an oral culture has learnt to communicate to the world through the written medium. That constitutes a tangible move from the colonial period. Currently children of oral cultures can write as effectively as children from written cultures (Nichols, 1989). That successfully reduces the patronizing barriers between the two cultures. Changes are occurring in other areas too.

The radical changes being proposed in education under the umbrella of

postmodernism give new dimensions to indigenous languages. The traditional notion that the teacher knows all the answers is being seriously challenged. Rather, education is continually being seen as a communal project in which all elements of society, human and material, need to be explored for their potential contribution to not only building society but also improving on what has already been accomplished (Ngugi, 2000). Listing the features of a postmodern classroom, Slattery (1995) alludes to the all-inclusive nature of postmodern curricula: “Reflective dialogue with *grandparents*, younger students, multicultural professionals, community activists, politicians, and religious leaders will be regular occurrences” (p. 96, italics added). He does not end there: “Active community involvement in environmental projects, health and social services, and *ethnic* preservation will become a priority” (p. 96, italics added).

Thus Slattery’s idea of postmodern curricula makes room for hybridism<sup>5</sup>; theoretically, it does not denigrate certain parties in order to elevate others, neither does it marginalize groups with uncomplimentary labels. Rather, all classes of people are included in the search for knowledge. One implication might be that broad-based knowledge is more authentic; it might also be an avenue to bridge the gap colonization has created among certain races and cultures over the years. To bridge the rift that exists between the (former) colonizer and the (former) colonized, certain traditional notions have to be constantly challenged. Postmodernism sometimes raises awareness about ideologies that endow one group of people with power and deprive others of it. In so doing, it attempts to bring the marginalized into the centre so that both the (former) centred and the (former) marginalized may be critiqued for their actions: “The postmodern has to do with transformation in the local ways we understand ourselves in

relation...to contemporary culture and history, the social and personal dimensions of that awareness, and the ethical and political responses that it generates” (The Culture Collective, 1995, p. 9). In effect, the focus is on the former colonized just as it is on the colonizer. Therefore, the young adults from oral cultures who fail to cultivate the necessary appreciation for indigenous cultures, particularly oral languages, share the former colonizer’s condescension for oral cultures. There is no room for complicity.

Paradoxically, postmodernism is far from answering questions of unequal representation; it probably heightens the controversy of dominance. bell hooks (1998), writing as an African-American female intellectual who continuously faces opposition from “a predominantly white institution” (p. 130), speaks for gender and colour when she discusses the bleak alternative postmodernism sometimes offers: “The overall impact of postmodernism is that many other groups now share with black folks a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of a sense of grounding even if not informed by shared circumstances” (p. 130). hooks highlights how a theory that seeks redress for the suppressed can effectively become the suppressing agent. She cites Black people as an example in the academic field. Black experience or writing does not command equal attention as white experience or writing in postmodern discussions. What is worse, when Black writings are mentioned the focus is usually on male writers not female discourses. The isolation created by the failure to recognize Black presence compels a Black, especially “a female black reader, to interrogate her interest in a subject where those who discuss and write about it seem not to know black women exist or even consider the possibility that [she] might be somewhere writing or saying something that should be listened to” (p. 131).

For the people trying so hard to make themselves heard over and above the din of cultural annexation, the elusive position of postmodernism, as described by hooks, makes it suspect. hooks continues: “Should we not be suspicious of postmodern critiques of ‘the subject’ when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time?” (1998, p. 133). hooks acknowledges that postmodern discussion is an “apt and oftentimes appropriate comeback” (p.133). Yet she does not see it as possessing absolute transformative prowess: “[I]t does not really intervene in the discourse in a way that alters and transforms” (p.133). The same might hold for other liberatory theories. By implication, theories alone can never suffice. Much more effort is needed from the suppressed subjects themselves if progressive socio-cultural changes are desired. The paradox of postmodernism might help readers to understand the dilemma of postcolonial studies when it comes to preserving aspects of former colonized cultures.

Among the major issues that the former colonized need to grapple with is the preservation of their oral languages and cultures. For the affected cultures the numerous economic, political, social and racial processes that have evolved over the years have not changed the status of cultures (Boer, 2002; Simonse, 1982); they remain oral and written ones. Each comes with its strengths and weaknesses; hence, rather than continue to allow the differences to undermine cultures, such differences may be explored as complementing one another’s culture. In that sense the pursuit of multiculturalism in various societies is a satisfying act. Yet urbanization, the fast pace of life and accelerating sophistication in acquiring, storing and retrieving information render perilous the primary means of preserving oral traditions, namely, transmission by word

of mouth (Miller, 1990). The turbulent histories of the oral and written cultures, the reality of written cultures having submerged oral cultures over the years, are only two of the numerous pressing reasons to find other means of preserving oral cultures. Paradoxically, the agency that marginalized the latter might rectify the past error by helping to preserve<sup>6</sup> it. Current situations underscore the dynamic role of writing in the preservation of oral languages and cultures.

Andra Thakur acknowledges the universal nature of proverbs but he is especially fond of the ones that are of “Afro-Indo-Guyanese derivation” (A Scholar, 2001, A.15). Thakur belongs to a multicultural society of African, Indian, American Indian, Chinese and European community in which the Guyanese variety of English is the common medium of expression. The language makes use of parables and proverbs in their day-to-day verbal exchanges. Thakur loves the proverbs and parables, which are also used during “quarrels”, “in political debates” and “in religious ceremonies”. The Guyanese scholar, however, acknowledges that the proverbs and parables are “by their nature, an oral language form, and no one has taken the time to write them down” (A Scholar, 2001). The only documented version of the parables and proverbs can be found “on the back of [one edition of] the telephone book” (A Scholar, 200, A.15). Thakur hints at the endangered status of oral cultures when he expresses the hope that “[the rear page of the telephone book] will not end up being the only written record of this culture once it has disappeared” (A Scholar, 2001, A.15). Oral cultures face imminent disappearance in the information age. Currently, oral languages that can preserve oral cultures are not always appreciably spoken; also, technological advancement makes it increasingly easy to store and retrieve information. Accordingly, unless stringent measures are taken to adopt a

lasting form of storing oral information, other than in human memory, the information age might spell the demise of oral cultures even faster than anticipated.

Certain oral societies have accepted the reality and taken up the challenge to borrow from the written tradition's conventional approaches in order to preserve aspects of oral culture. Gurza (2000) reports efforts by some oral communities to preserve their languages: "[T]hroughout the country, language preservers are videotaping their grandparents to record their words. They are also writing new dictionaries, and going to special language camps where the trees and streams and other natural landmarks are labelled with their Indian names" (p. 3). Just as Noskiye utilizes English whilst maintaining his first language, the efforts described above appear to be sending the message: "We should have English, but not at the expense of other languages. We can have them both" (Zepada, as quoted in Gurza, 2000, p. 3). Changes in attitudes could also signify a distinct move away from the colonial era. Genuine interest towards oral languages also denotes attempts to preserve the cultures that are represented by the languages. In other words, by preserving their languages, the people are also attempting to preserve their identities, which they claim through indigenous cultures.

Both oral and written languages are crucial to the intellectual considerations of the postcolonial era; this is perhaps a direct result of the central position language has always occupied in the history of colonization. Subsequently the (former) colonizer's attitude towards oral languages could either replicate imperialistic tendencies or imply the desire to move from the hazy colonial arena into a clearly demarcated postcolonial zone. Ngugi (2000) situates the language controversy within postcolonial intellectual pursuits but addresses the former colonized:

We can see [control] in the way we are brought to regard the English language as the basis of definition of our own identity ... we see it as a way of defining our own being. We become captives to this language, developing certain attitudes of positive identification with English (or French). We also develop attitudes of distancing ourselves from our own languages, our own cultures. It is not simply a question of acquiring another important tool; the acquisition of that intellectual tool becomes a process of alienating ourselves from our own languages and what they can in fact produce. (p. 124)

Ngugi is not reiterating his past call for the rejection of English departments in African universities; he acknowledges the impossibility of this (p. 119). He merely reiterates the appeal to learn to handle dominant and minority languages from balanced perspectives.

Such sentiments and current developments such as Gurza (2000) records give the young adults from oral cultures, who might find it difficult to appreciate oral languages, food for thought. A vast space may be found for oral languages and cultures on the postmodern knowledge accumulation train, since they also constitute spiritual as well as physical worldviews (Gandhi, 1998). Lessons from the past could motivate initiatives not only to resist replicating colonial patterns but forestall the re-currence of certain painful deeds. Therefore, if the young adults from oral cultures ignore their languages and constantly reach for dominant ones, the former colonized become their own antagonists; they elevate dominant cultures at the expense of minority ones. There might not be any calculated reason for such preference, but it could echo the old condescending sentiment, civilized as opposed to savage, the old sentiment that gives

rise to colonialism.

It has been more than six centuries since modern colonization began. The seeming impenetrable fog between the colonial and the postcolonial period does not reflect the tangible strides being made in some areas of human endeavours. The issues to overcome are numerous, yet a commencement has to be made at some point. As to which issues will accelerate tangible progress, each group will have to decide for themselves. For people with colonized backgrounds, a (re)starting point may be seriously revisiting our attitudes towards our indigenous languages and cultures.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Young Adults from Colonial Backgrounds: The Choices They Make

It is supertime in the boarding house of a girls' secondary school. Prempeh gets to the dining hall late; consequently she gets the remnant of cooked rice that was served to her table of fourteen for dinner. There is not enough gravy to go with the rice, a not unusual consequence for late attendance in the dining hall. Prempeh approaches the head-girl who also happens to be a friend; she hopes to persuade the latter to use the influence of her office in getting the kitchen staff to serve her dinner. Two classmates of the school prefect, silent witnesses at first, join the dialogue that ensues between Prempeh and the girls' prefect, Akoto.

Prempeh: (Her bowl of rice in her outstretched hand as she approaches the head girl who is conversing with a member of the kitchen staff) Akoto I cannot eat raw rice; *I'll get Babaso if I do.*

Akoto: (Startled, but quickly regains her composure and explodes into laughter which draws her mates closer). *No you won't Prempeh! You cannot get Babaso from eating raw rice; you get Beriberi.*

Prempeh: (Shrugs) *Oh well I'll get Beriberi then. Could you please get the staff to add gravy to my rice?*

(Akoto gives the go ahead and the kitchen woman gives Prempeh gravy; the latter

having been served then moves away, satisfied).

Boa: (The first of the two standing by). *Akoto, what is the English term for Babaso?*

Akoto: Gonorrhoea.

Boa: (Turning to her companion in jest). Akoto, you are so fluent in Twi! (The two walk away, the latter still jesting).

Akoto: Of course, it's my language! What would you expect me to be fluent in?

(She returns to the kitchen staff but she's peeved for being laughed at because she can speak her mother tongue better than the average student).

The dialogue above is a real incident; names have been changed in order to protect the identities of the speakers involved. The dialogue remains exactly as it occurred.

The participants whose responses are quoted in this chapter and the next three are: Mercy, Becky and Eunice, Cree young women; Eben, a Cree young man; Kwaku Panin, Kwaku Ketewa and Frank, young men from Ghana; Rachel, a young woman from Kenya; Nana, a female Ghanaian elder; and Robin, a male Cree elder.

### **Former Colonies' Dilemma with Language**

The dialogue above is significant for a number of reasons: First it is highly significant that the boarding school in question is located in Ghana, West Africa. Ghana is a country often described by both scholars and politicians as a former British colony for political, historical, economic and academic reasons. The label, former British colony, automatically acknowledges an inextricable link between the (former) colonizer and the (former) colonized, for various reasons. Secondly the dialogue throws some light on the language situation in the country. Akoto and her mates are sixth formers, which

means that they have spent the last seven years in the secondary school according to the dictates of the country's educational system<sup>7</sup>. The former British colony that had been independent for three decades at the time the dialogue above occurred still operated an educational system implemented by the colonial administrators. One of the policies of the country's curriculum is that English language is a compulsory subject whilst the native languages are electives. Consequently, whereas English is taught every day, vernacular<sup>8</sup>--and French--are taught twice a week. By default students come out of secondary school with a certain amount of exposure to the mother tongue, but that exposure is in woefully inadequate proportions when juxtaposed with their exposure to the English language. On a microcosmic level, the dialogue sets the background for the challenges young people from oral cultures encounter in their efforts to speak their mother tongue; the larger picture offers insight into the complexities involved in oral cultures' struggle to survive in a highly competitive world and the implications for the socio-cultural identities of the young adults involved.

The dialogue also sums up well a disturbing but common trend among Ghanaian young adults; a good number of the young adult population do not have a firm grasp of their native language, as evidenced by Prempeh's inadvertent use of a term, the stigma of which has people use it only when they are required to. As well, it was wrong within the context in which it was used. Prempeh does not blink at her use of the word because she is simply not aware of the social implications of the term; neither does it cause a stir with her small audience because they all belong to Prempeh's linguistic rank. When Bown (1973) refers to the art of oral languages, he means in part the speech decorum that speakers attempt to uphold. Certain expressions, utterances and words are simply

not used in public and if they are they must be preceded by a stoic apologetic expression explaining the unavoidable use of such an expression. Prempeh breaks one such rule but for Akoto the slip might not even have been noticed at the time. At best young adults of Prempeh's social level possess colloquial skills yet that does not present any big challenge to such young adults. The ones with real problems are the minority who have mastered the use of their native language and the art of oral language. Like Akoto, such ones have to put up with constant bantering and condescension from their peers.

The fact that fluent speakers of oral languages also tend to be fluent in the dominant language conveniently escapes those who ridicule. Thus Akoto who was also one of the best English language students in her class grew accustomed to answering questions on English language and literature, albeit on a more serious note than what transpired between her and Boa. If the former has learnt a valuable lesson about languages, it is that genuine love for one's language may instil genuine regard for other languages. It is not by fluke that Akoto has acquired vocabulary in her native language as well as her second language. She invested proportionately in both her mother tongue and her second language. But that does not interest her teasing mate. The situation has parallels for some Aboriginal young adults in Canada.

In fact some Aboriginal young adults have had to make the painful choice between their mother tongue and English in order to avoid being jeered at by their tribal folks. Becky, a Cree woman, shares her past experience. When she moved into the city she could not speak her mother tongue without being laughed at by her Aboriginal friends. One of her colleagues teased her thus: *She speaks English like a native*. Now she speaks only English, hoping that she rapidly improves in her English whilst reducing her

first language interference.

For certain Aboriginal young adults it is a futile predicament because when they are not being laughed at because they speak English like Aboriginals--which they are--they get chastised for not speaking their native languages with the right accent. Either way, however, the native languages suffer while English looms ahead, because the ones who get laughed at simply leave off speaking the native language and stick to English. Consequently, if such speakers acquired any fluency at all, it would be in English or whichever dominant language they would resort to speak regularly. Eunice, a Cree young adult, shares her thoughts on people's reluctance to speak Cree: *For some people that I know who understand it but don't speak it, it is because they don't want to be made fun of. You get laughed at if you speak the wrong way. That's a way big barrier for people.* Eunice speaks of an acquaintance who grew up not knowing English; consequently the latter totally understands and speaks excellent Cree. Sadly the said acquaintance who until very recently spoke only the mother tongue has ceased speaking it since she moved from one Aboriginal community into another Aboriginal community. Her new Aboriginal neighbours laugh at her accent because it is different from that associated with the area: *Yes she spoke with a different accent and so she was made fun of when she moved down, so she quit speaking it. So now she just speaks English.*

When asked to cite examples of the people who teased and unwittingly dissuaded her friend from speaking her mother tongue, Eunice answers: *Everybody--her family, her friends, adults around--because she said things in a different way. She would say it right but in a different way and she was teased about it.* Eunice then relates her own experience and the measures she takes to protect herself from being taunted: *I try to*

*speak it; I learn words but I guess I don't speak it as much as I should. But when I moved to my reserve I didn't want to speak it in front of people because I had just moved in from the city and I thought they would laugh at me if I said things the wrong way. It's hard.* Yet Eunice persists in learning Cree; she is utilizing what she currently perceives to be the opportune time: *Because I've realized--well since going to the Indian college--that it's so important for us to learn these things now. What if my aunt dies in say ten years? Who am I going to have to teach me? So I'm more receptive and I actively go and speak to her and ask her questions and stuff. Even though she'll get mad, I still ask her.* The decision to allow herself to be taught by her aunt could not have come easily to Eunice; yet she might be a model for other young adults from the Cree community

In another development, Eben, also a Cree speaker, makes no reference to being teased but he finds life simpler when he communicates in English. Eben easily compares with a first or second class Ghanaian student in being overly exposed to the English language; just as the Ghanaian young adults would spend a good part of his/her life in school, formal education has played a major role in Eben's life: *I can remember we moved into the city so that we could get better educated. It was a deliberate strategy of my parents to move there. We (my siblings and I) might not have gotten a great education in a reserve setting.* Eben has had a good formal education, a by-product of which is (his) fluency in English language. Incidentally his mother is English so that gives Eben an equal allegiance towards the English language. Whilst Eben's main contact with the Aboriginal community occurred in his childhood, Eunice has had the chance to live in an Aboriginal community as a young adult, hence her experience with fluent Cree speakers' tendency to taunt and her subsequent hesitation to speak Cree at

certain times. Urbanized Eben makes no reference to being taunted; for him speaking English is routine: *Even when I talk to other Aboriginal people it's just easier to communicate in English.*

Even so, Eben must be unwittingly protecting himself when he makes a preference for English in his daily interactions with his Cree contemporaries. He says: *That's what we've been used to communicating verbally with--most of us understand English. Even if I talk to other students who can speak Cree very well, we just talk in English because its better for them than for me to say the odd word and mess it up with my pronunciation and stuff like that.* Apparently Eben wants to avoid the awkwardness that arises if an Aboriginal exhibits poor skills while speaking the language among fellow Aboriginals. The irony is that people like Eben and Eunice might pick up the language quickly if they spoke it regularly and also if they got the necessary help--rather than taunts--from members of their language community. That might have prompted Eunice to sum up her frustration with the situation in this manner: *You can't learn your language with the non-Aboriginal people because they don't speak it, right? But then with your own people who you can learn your language from, who could help you, they are the ones that laugh at you and make you feel too embarrassed to continue learning and practicing it. They must be supportive inside, I guess, but their actions discourage you.* That sounds like a plea to the Cree language community to help the eager young adults who are willing to (re)invest in their native languages as well as in their cultures.

The situation as it has been described in Ghana and in Canada sounds like a game that has got out of hand. The people who laugh are not spiteful, as Eunice rightly indicates, just as Akoto's mate is not being mean; Boa simply partakes of a language

game which draws people of all types at one point in time or another. The only concern is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw the line between humour and hurt. Fluent speakers are sometimes pushed beyond their limit of endurance. Akoto has often laughed with other students when they have cracked jokes about fluent native speakers or the native language, prior to and after the dialogue above, but she got hurt that one time. Her mates, however, were oblivious to her feelings. To Boa it was one of those moments when she could laugh at the expense of an average native language speaker, but to Akoto it was a joke taken too far. To her credit, though, Akoto has never allowed the leg pulling to deter her from learning more about her language. Her sense of humour comes to her rescue on critical occasions. Similarly, Eunice sees humour through her frustration. In fact she sees the teasing more as a cultural issue than as a spiteful gesture: *When I moved into my reserve I found that it's so common for you to be teased; everybody teases everybody. I was just shocked when I moved over there. People wouldn't stop bothering you and I was just, like, holy cow, what's wrong with these people! But that's just how the people are; that's how people are in the reserves. It's just an everyday thing and you'd better get used to it.* Eunice summarizes the situation for what it is; people like to laugh even at the expense of one another.

Much as one cannot fault the need to laugh, one cannot ignore the fact that unappreciated laughter can yield undesirable outcomes. For the young adults who have contributed to this study, being laughed at by tribal people makes speaking their mother tongue regularly a difficult choice. Yet there are other factors that make the choice even harder.

## **Formal Education as a Micro Marginalizing Agent**

Education definitely is the strongest agent that equips young adults from oral cultures with good (dominant) language skills. No former colony appears to have avoided being affected (Mazrui, 1978). Rachel, a Kenyan doing her undergraduate studies in Canada, and her immediate younger sister, are the only ones among their siblings who can speak their mother tongue; the others can understand but cannot speak it. As to why the latter are facing that difficulty, Rachel's response enlightens us on the evolving nature of the issue: *Oh, parents are busy working and everything-- it's like a fast life, school, all these influences. Most of the city kids don't speak their own language.* Rachel then goes on to elaborate on the role formal education plays in her part of the world: *We aren't allowed to speak our languages in school.* The schools in Kenya, like Ghanaian schools, are a forum for unequal access to different languages. In theory, vernacular is permissible in Ghanaian schools only on those occasions when it appears on the timetable. Needless to say, this policy has never been fully enforced, yet it is the general rule and one of the reasons Ghanaian students tend to speak English on a regular basis. In Akoto's school, speaking vernacular was sometimes a punishable offence; alternatively, students would be fined for speaking vernacular if the setting was not a classroom one.

That sounds peculiarly like the situation Mercy, an Aboriginal woman currently enrolled in a university programme, describes when she started school in Canada. Mercy had nuns for teachers; she describes the native language situation during her time thus: *You got the strap, if you spoke Cree.* Robin, the Cree elder, easily relates to that experience: *We used to get punished when we used our language.* Kenyan students did

not get the strap. Rachel does not allude to students being punished in any way for not speaking the mother tongue; however, the country appears to operate the same system which makes it very easy for one language to be spoken at the expense of another. Rachel elaborates: *English is a compulsory subject*. From a certain angle the insistence on English language is logical within the Kenyan context in which more than forty tribes cohabit the country. Rachel explains: *We aren't really encouraged to speak the African languages because we have so many tribes, many dialects*. Rather than encounter the controversy that might arise from paying unequal attention to the dialects of the land, Kenya has adopted Swahili as a *lingua franca*, in addition to the English language. Thus the issue of sidelining some local languages while projecting others apparently does not arise; the two national languages ensure that.

Swahili distinguishes Ghana from Kenya, both former colonies of Britain. Whereas the former has only one national medium of expression, the latter has two. In Kenya, Swahili as well as English is compulsory in the schools. Rachel explains: *Most of the time we learn Swahili; it's a compulsory subject*. Based on Rachel's experience, a Kenyan young adult would also come out of school better exposed to English and Swahili than s/he would be in the mother tongue. That is also not peculiar to Kenya.

Kwaku Panin, a Ghanaian young adult, has been in school for about twenty-three years; of those years he remembers eleven years of actively studying vernacular, which also happens to be his mother tongue. Eleven years is a bit encouraging but that is because Kwaku Panin attended a public school in his elementary years. The situation is different for children who attend private schools, otherwise known within the Ghanaian community as international schools. Kwaku Ketewa attended an international school in

Ghana. Such schools often have the distinction of producing students who excel in the English language, sometimes French too. To avoid first language interference in teaching English, such schools insist on their pupils speaking English all the time. Consequently the vernacular does not appear on the timetable of most private schools in Ghana; products of “international” schools are often the most disadvantaged when it comes to using the native languages. Kwaku Ketewa is a product of one such school. Kwaku Ketewa, who is currently doing his undergraduate studies in a Canadian university, does not remember learning Twi, his mother tongue, in the elementary school because he attended a private school. Actually the only chance he got to learn Twi came when he went to the secondary school. All secondary schools follow a general curriculum structure; students are introduced to all subjects in the first three years. Beginning from the fourth year they stick to their electives. That is the only reason Kwaku Ketewa got to study his native language for three years out of the thirteen years he has spent studying. Not surprisingly, he can neither read nor write Twi; he only speaks it.

Kwaku Ketewa’s experience underscores the relevance of the native language curricula pursued by public schools in Ghana, inadequate though they might be, as an effective method for acquiring native language skills. At least, through the efforts of the public schools, students who care enough to study can acquire good skills with which to handle their respective native languages (Saussure, 1916). On the contrary, if things were left solely to the private schools in Ghana, the native languages might be in dire straits by now. What is worse, Kwaku Ketewa’s further comment indicates that the larger community is implicated in the language tangle: *It is becoming a norm in Ghana;*

*almost every household speaks English.* Kwaku Ketewa is here giving a typical urban picture. The situation is not that desperate in the rural areas; however, the urban population largely kowtows to the private schools. Thus an appreciable number of educated parents in the urban areas speak English with their children at home so as to help them perfect their English language skills. It is becoming increasingly difficult to draw the line between home and school. Whereas in the past parents would speak their native language(s) with their children, an act which effectively counterbalanced children's overexposure to English at school, currently that does not happen in certain urban homes. Therefore, even as one discusses the role of the school in the diminished use of native languages in Ghana, one constantly needs to include the negligence of the local language communities. One sad effect of this situation is that the native languages have hardly any impact on certain Ghanaian young adults.

Rachel's recollection of her native language experience in Kenya is not too different from the scenario depicted of Ghana. Like Akoto and Kwaku Panin, Rachel got the opportunity to learn her mother tongue in school, yet the experience does not register too strongly with her probably because it occurred too early in life: *When I was growing up we learnt dialects. That's when I went to live in the rural area for a year, I think. I remember we learnt it but that was a long time ago when I was in the lower primary years.* Kenyan schools also make the effort to give Kenyan children some amount of exposure to the native languages, but as to the impact this has on the individual, Rachel's experience might help: *I can't remember if it was Kalenjin or Swahili. I think learning my dialect was just a fluke; it wasn't a big thing. I think it was just really in the first three years of school.* Rachel evidently does not owe her

current native language skills to those years in the elementary school since she cannot even remember which language she studied for three years. What she is certain of is that she did not study the native language in her senior years.

The issue in the two former colonies then is not the tangible gesture of putting vernacular on the timetable; the two countries have done that, so has Canada for Aboriginal children, in recent years. However, it would appear that the time allotted to the vernacular in both Kenya and Ghana is so insignificant when considered within the general timeframe that a student spends acquiring formal education and the time s/he spends in learning English. Inadequate exposure, however, is not the only limiting factor when considering native language studies.

### **The Content of Native Language Curricula**

Another issue in need of consideration is the content material of the native language curriculum. In Ghana native language instruction is structured in the same manner as English and French. In the elementary school pupils begin to learn the alphabet systems and the formation of simple words. They also get the chance to study the rudimentary laws of the language, for example, turning singular objects to plural ones. They are also taught pronunciation and simple sentence construction. By the time pupils reach the upper primary years they can form simple sentences; good pupils have progressed to simple descriptive and narrative essays in the mother tongues. They are also gradually introduced to literature-- prose, poetry and drama in the vernacular.

When they get to the secondary schools, students begin to learn further language rules and the differences that exist between their native languages and other native languages on one hand, and between the native language and English. At this stage they

get better acquainted with various genres in literature; what is more, they are capable of composing essays of all kinds in the mother tongue. Native language students in Ghana therefore have the opportunity to engage in higher discourse in the native languages, if they so desire. Moreover, the depth of native language curricula in that country makes it possible to juxtapose aspects of them with that of dominant languages in the classroom, thanks to the curriculum design. That has also helped Akoto to reason that all languages can perform similar functions from different linguistic perspectives; hence they are of equal importance. That was a good motivation for continuous investment in the mother tongue. Yet the situation as it has been described can apply only to diligent students who also get the necessary help from home and the language community in general.

Certain Aboriginal young adults would like to see the current Cree curriculum serve the intellectual needs of the Aboriginal young adults in more ways than the curriculum currently allows. Becky has had Cree lessons since grade one. Her lessons consisted of vocabulary, pronunciation and identification of objects. It appears that was the extent of Becky's lessons because she admits that the lessons could not be developed into discourse. It is not surprising that she cannot write Cree though she can speak it fairly fluently. Becky hopes that things are different for Cree students now. She would like to see a learning system that goes beyond the fundamentals in Cree.

However, the general picture does not seem to have improved on the past, not for Eunice whose first contact with formal Cree occurred late in life. Eunice has taken some Cree lessons and is not very impressed with the current system: *I took Cree classes in high school--Cree 10, 11, 12 or 20 or 30 but I found it really difficult because they were just teaching the basics like how to count from one up to ten in all three grades and*

*how do you say mother and father. Just simple stuff that you learn from grade ten that they should be adding more stuff onto as you get into the higher grades. I know that even in the university they still teach the basics. They're not building up on each year; they were teaching us the basics in each year, so it was really frustrating.* It must be frustrating indeed to go through similar learning material for three years; the lessons as Eunice describes appear not to get challenging in later years, as it usually is the case with language curricula. The probable monotony of the classes described above might be enough to kill one's enthusiasm for the language. Moreover, such a curriculum might not reflect in any way the complex system that the language might be composed of. In short, offering the same content at different levels as a way of teaching a language trivializes the language.

The participants do not indicate whether there are distinct arrangements for adult education in Cree studies. Neither of the two Cree interviewees has taken university classes in Cree. The Cree focus group has taken university classes in Cree, but neither discusses the educational objectives of the Cree curriculum at the university level. Instead, they discuss their communicative limitations. They also admit that the Cree language is changing (Harrington et al., 2000). Becky finds it difficult to follow the written Cree taught at the university, because she is used to the oral Cree. Both women indicate that oral or standard Cree has no suffix but written Cree does. Apparently, the innovations of written Cree add to the difficulty for natives who have hitherto been using oral Cree.

Apparently the ultimate goal in learning a language is fluency, however its speakers might define it. One does not achieve fluency by learning only the elementary

things in a language; progressing into and mastering the diverse aspects of a language eventually result in fluency. That however does not appear to be the situation in contemporary Cree studies. Elder Robin, also a Cree teacher, does the break up in this manner: From kindergarten to grade one pupils are introduced to Cree conversation. The lessons offered from grades two to four are intended to give pupils enough Cree to understand and probably make conversation in Cree. The teacher describes communication at this level as “physical responses” to *simple utterances* (emphasis mine). By grade nine they should be able to write Cree, yet that will not mean that they have reached the level of fluency. The teacher describes fluency in Cree thus: *Being able to hold conversation in Cree without having to use other languages.*

Since the average Cree learner who has gone through the system cannot hold a conversation consistently in Cree, s/he cannot be said to be fluent after grade twelve. The teacher attributes this failure to a number of reasons, among which is migration, which undermines progress because the schools cannot keep the same students long enough to take them through the whole curriculum. The point, however, is that Cree studies are also dominated by English studies. According to the teacher, a student needs at least ninety hours of Cree lessons as compared with about one hundred and twenty hours of English in ten months. The learning objective is fluency. These factors notwithstanding, a Cree student who finished high school would, like a Ghanaian or a Kenyan young adult, have been exposed more to English than to his or her mother tongue. Consequently such a person might speak English better than s/he would the mother tongue, as has happened to Eunice and Eben. At least a native language student in Ghana who took the lessons seriously could come out of high school with a high

degree of fluency. However, even if a Cree student stayed at one place long enough to cover the entire Cree curriculum, that student, according to the Cree teacher above, would not achieve appreciable linguistic fluency.

In view of this the Cree participants might be making a genuine case about the present Cree curricula. Making language students learn materials that they do not find challenging enough could have very negative consequences; presenting language students with materials that cannot help them to achieve the ultimate learning objective might further alienate students from a subject. Rather than serve motivational purposes, prospective students might regard inadequate curricula contemptuously, especially if the curriculum is persistently seen as below the standards of learners. Eunice recounts an interesting experience: I was speaking to another friend of mine; she's taking a Cree class over at the college here; it's a university level Cree class and she said: "*I can count up to four in Cree*". And we were laughing and someone said: "*Well you should know how to count up to ten*", so they are not building on the knowledge. Eunice and her friends are not the only ones who find fault with the Cree language curriculum.

Eben also feels very strongly about the subject though his concern is partly that the Cree curriculum does not have the same recognition that other languages on the bilingual curricula have in Canadian schools: *The Cree curriculum has not moved into a stimulating level; it's not accepted so I see it as a pointless thing*. Eben shares Eunice's sentiments about the things that are taught to Cree students. Ironically he is planning on taking a Cree course at the university in the coming year in spite of the fact that he does not appreciate the existing curriculum. In fact he does not see Cree playing any role in his future if the curriculum remains unchanged: *If I were to raise kids I would rather let*

*them learn French and be bilingual because there are more teaching material out there for bilingual kids for English and French. There would be only a watered-down version of Cree in school. Even at the university it's like a watered-down version of Cree. They don't really teach numbers in Cree, they don't teach intellectual thoughts in Cree. You never get to that point. You get to: This is yellow, this is blue, this is how you say January, February, March, April, yee! So what's the point? How intellectually stimulating are my kids going to be if they speak Cree with each other? I think it's pointless. The situation deserves serious attention because it has future implications for the Cree language.*

From Eben's point of view, the current efforts to restore and preserve the language are of no significance if learners cannot engage in intellectual discourse in it; they still might not grasp the culture (Gurza, 2000). Apparently, considerable resources are being expended on the Cree language curriculum in some Canadian schools; therefore, it might be worthwhile to consistently work at improving on the quality of curriculum and instruction. The participants' criticisms of the Cree curriculum are quite specific to Western Canada, yet parallels might be found in other parts of the nation.

### **A Complex Situation**

Undoubtedly the native language situation is a complex one for the Ghanaian, Kenyan and Canadian Aboriginal young adults interviewed in this study. They acknowledge the fact that it is impossible to do without formal education. They also realize that if they are to make it in mainstream societies, they need more than their native languages. The presence of Kenyan and Ghanaian young adults in Canada, a Western culture and a multinational society, is a significant enough factor that young adults from minor

cultures need additional language(s) that will give them access to or maneuverability within international communities.

Frank, another Ghanaian young adult, puts it this way: *People learn the language that will serve them on the international scene.* In that sense the three countries' educational systems have adopted the practical step in endowing their young adults with the language skills that will enhance their worldly opportunities, otherwise they might be handicapped in communication at various levels within the mainstream society. The young adults might agree that the educational systems that they went through might each need to be improved on, yet they are grateful to the schools for helping them to acquire good English language skills. Rachel takes a very objective stance but reinforces Frank's point: *The world is changing. You can't really get stuck in there; you are going to lose. If you stick to the old culture the kids are going to be disadvantaged, so somehow you have to accept the Western culture a little bit for your own future.* Eunice sees through reciprocal lenses, a meaningful multicultural approach: *I always say that you have to try and find a balance; we have to learn about one another other's culture.* Eben also has the future in mind, which is why he appreciates his education. Furthermore, he would like to make similar provision for his children: *English is becoming a dominant and a global thing. If I ever have kids I would want my kids to be successful and have a university education.* Eben's children would need formal education to go to university; incidentally, he shares mainstream ideology and links success with higher education. That might be a good indication of the relevance of formal education to young adults, even to ones from oral backgrounds.

The young adults define success in different ways; Frank highlights Eben's

definition of success by adding an economic dimension. In contemporary metropolitan locations the prospects for a good career also determines the language a young person decides to invest in. Frank comments: *Economic factors determine which language people prefer. You invest in the medium that you are going to communicate in at work. Maybe if Ghana was an industrial country like Japan both Ghanaians and the international community would consider our languages in order to trade with us.* Frank considers it imperative to learn dominant languages. The economic survival of people from former colonized countries depends, to a great extent, on the ability to speak dominant languages. The global compactness emerging through technology has caught both dominant and minor cultures in an inevitable cycle of interdependence. It is practical to work towards constructing an independent space within that global intermingling rather than fight to preserve cultural practices in forms that might eventually render such practices “antiquities” rather than practical. From those perspectives the schools perform invaluable services to the young adults from (former) colonies in the dominant language skills they offer. Incidentally, English fulfills invaluable roles even on the local scene.

Ghana needs English to ensure peaceful co-existence among the numerous tribes that inhabit the nation. Their languages or dialects very often differentiate the tribes; hence, intertribal communication can depend on a common language. English serves that purpose. When it comes to intertribal marriages English serves the common language for such households at least until such time that spouses manage to learn one another’s dialect. Thus English serves very good purposes for the former colonies apart from economic ones. The schools in Ghana and Kenya play critical roles in teaching English

even if they fail to offer the same learning opportunities to both dominant and minority languages. The young adults who were interviewed look to other sources when it comes to their mother tongue. Apparently, the schools need their efforts complemented in imparting native language skills; naturally, the young adults from former colonies expect their respective language communities to help them acquire fluent skills in a/the mother tongue.

### **The Power Language Communities Wield**

For a language to prosper it must be spoken (Zepeda, quoted in Gurza, 2000; Bonvillain, 1993); subsequently, wherever there is language one invariably finds a respective community of speakers. In other words, the absence of a spoken community could imply that a language was either dead or remains merely for antique purposes (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998). That sets the tone for the relevance of language communities to spoken media. In fact language communities deterritorialize languages. In a colonizing environment language communities are the only agencies that collapse language ranks at defined locations. Eunice shares another interesting thought: *Well, English for sure is dominant, especially if you live in the cities; then you need to know English to do your business or to get a job and stuff like that. Cree will be a minor language that you probably will speak in your home. But you know as you go more north they speak more Cree and they really are good at retaining their language, the native communities. The kids and babies are fluent and that's really surprising. When we go to powwows and meet up with these kids and they are speaking really fast, and they really know their words really well, and they're respectful too; they're very respectful people because of their language, I assume. Yea, so as you go more north Cree languages*

*might be dominant, but here in Saskatoon English is dominant.*

Kwaku Panin also explains how Twi deranks English within the Asante community. Its monarchy, also its chieftaincy, is one institution that ensures the exclusive use of the Asante mother tongue and renders the language dominant within that community: *I don't know about other cultures, but I know that for the Asantes as soon as you are enthroned as the king or a chief you don't speak any other language in public. It doesn't matter who your guests are you have to speak your mother tongue and then somebody will interpret to your guests [when there are foreigners among the people gathered].* Kwaku is referring to cultural and social gatherings within the Asante tradition even as Eunice describes Powwows among the Cree people. It appears that cultural gatherings serve as good occasions for people to use the mother tongue.

Rachel cherishes such gatherings among her people. To her it is one place English simply does not belong: *It's almost natural that when I go to the farm I don't speak English with my friends. That's rude to my grandparents; first of all they don't understand it. We have workers who don't understand. Why would I want to speak to my sister in English at the farm? What am I trying to show them? It's simply disrespectful. There we don't use foreign language; no English for sure.* Rachel will only speak English at the farm if she were with a foreigner who could neither speak Swahili nor Kalenjin. Evidently the designation of dominant and minority languages is not constant. They apply to defined situations as well as designated geographical locations. Rachel uses certain settings in Kenya to elaborate: Swahili is the general thing. If you go to a rural area where you know most of the people are illiterates, Swahili is the best. But if you go to a business meeting or a teachers' union you probably use both English and

Swahili. Then they use both Swahili and the Kalenjin on the farms. Collapsing ranks does not occur only at traditional settings.

Eben illustrates that Cree asserts itself even on the market scene, thus competing with the dominant languages for speakers' attention; just as one can opt for a dominant language for economic or utilitarian reasons, in certain situations speakers chose Cree for the same reasons. He says: *I want to learn Cree so that I can get a job in a Cree community. I guess it gives me an edge; it's like a bonus for the people. It will give me an extra playing card if I can have a Cree interview or say extra Cree words.* Eben explains that his Aboriginal community would give priority to a candidate who spoke Cree. If that is a strategy adopted by the Cree community to encourage young adults to invest a bit in the mother tongue, it may be impacting on some young adults, considering Eben's response. It would be interesting to find out if other young adults react in the same manner towards the Aboriginal requirement for native language when employing people on the reserve. It also holds out hope for the language. If minority languages are dominant in certain locations the implications are that they are constantly used there; that maximizes their chances of survival in a multilingual world, which ironically creates unequal spaces for world languages and subsequently highlights some by marginalizing others.

It is therefore no coincidence that all the oral speakers interviewed for this study agree that the survival of their languages and cultures does not depend on the dominant society; rather, their respective language communities must champion it. That is native speakers' responsibility. Eunice is of the opinion that the young adults can only learn the mother tongue to communicative levels if the language community offers its

support: *The only way to really learn the language is to be completely surrounded by people speaking Cree all the time and then you can pick it up.* She who considers her first language to be English because she is more fluent in it is making earnest efforts to learn Cree, her mother tongue. Eunice is not counting on formal lessons, which is not surprising, considering that she spent three years learning the same material; rather, she is depending on the Cree language community to help her get a full grasp of the language: *I guess you just need to be around people who speak your language in order to keep it up and to speak it at home as much as possible so that you don't lose it. I know that when I go to visit my family and the reserves of course they speak Cree because they are older and I always listen to them. I don't really understand them but I always listen; it's a sense of respect and I always try to pick out what they are saying. Everybody does that actually, we always listen and try to pick out what they are saying. We just find that important. When I was younger I didn't think it was so important but now that I'm getting older I'm starting to realize that you have to pay attention to stuff.*

The notion that the language community is the best place to learn one's mother tongue appears to hold for the other young adults as well. The onus of responsibility therefore rests on the Kalenjin, Cree and Twi language communities to patronize their languages and preserve their linguistic heritage for future generations. That goes for the young adults as well. To understand the rationale behind the young adults' demand from their language communities, one needs a glimpse of what language means for these young adults.

### **The Cord of Two Strands**

Language appears to hold a dual meaning for these young adults from colonial

backgrounds: primarily, language allows them to communicate with others; but as mother tongue language evolves into a concept of personal and cultural dimensions which have direct bearing on the individual identities with which they can assert themselves. The young adults' perception of language as ascertained from their responses to questions about the role language plays in their everyday lives is that language basically forms the essence of their interaction with others. It is an empowering tool for them; they have mastered the rules of language systems and can communicate intelligibly with others (Saussure, 1916).

Kwaku Panin asserts that his daily human exchange is achieved through language. Furthermore, he indicates that he would not be capable of much if he did not have his mother tongue and second language: *I think I cannot do anything--I'll end the day doing nothing if I don't have language. Yes I do everything with language.* Eunice believes there would be serious communicative limitations if one did not have the ability to use language(s) variously: *You need language to talk to people. If you don't have language you can't really communicate; you can't really do very much stuff. So it's really very important in everyday life and everything.* Eunice considers language from the physical act of human utterances as well as a human communicative medium. She illustrates her point thus: *If you catch a cold, you can't talk because your throat is so sore. It's so hard to just say, "I need a glass of water" or something like that. Language's really important.* Language also serves important purposes in Eben's life even if he does not see it as the mutually exclusive empowering tool that the others believe it to be. When asked what role language serves in his everyday life, he starts from collective dimensions: *I guess to speak to different people, right? It's one of the*

*main channels of communication. Then he makes it personal: It expresses who I am, the way I choose to say my words*

Offering the simplest comment, Rachel reiterates the empowering element in human ability to use language: *It's just a means of communication.* Each young adult attaches importance to language inasmuch as it facilitates human communication. If the concept of language is relevant to their daily existence, the concept of mother tongue appears to be crucial to their presence within a multicultural society. The worth of language, it appears, maximizes when it performs as mother tongue. And well it should be because it is the lifeline of the cultures from which the participants come and the basis of their individual identities (Nichols, 1989). To that effect, English might be Eunice's first language, but she has not the slightest doubt as to what gives shape to her individual identity in multicultural Canada: *Mother tongue! I think it's a part of who you are or it should be a part of who you are because it is part of your history. Your parents or grandparents spoke that and each culture has its own meanings in its language, so your mother tongue is a reflection of the values and ideas or the culture from which you come. That's the reason I think Cree is my mother tongue and English is my first language. English I know more so it must be my first language but Cree language is what I ought to know, and it's where I come from. So it's my mother tongue.*

Kwaku Panin extends the idea of mother tongue and belongingness; he approaches it from his cultural perspectives: *I think the mother tongue is the language you're born to inherit. For instance, if you are born into an Asante family, you inherit the Akan language depending on the family line<sup>9</sup>. Mother tongue is the language your*

*parents or your ancestors speak.* Rachel does not stray from the concept that Eunice and Kwaku Panin builds of mother tongue. She even makes it a more closely-knit affair: I think it is that language through which you can communicate to your close family, clan maybe. Elaborating on the last statement, Rachel explains that her native language creates for her the opportunity to communicate to her family in a language other than the colonizer's or Swahili. She believes her mother tongue creates a setting of intimacy for her tribal people both at home and abroad.

When asked whether one's mother tongue is intuitive or acquired, Rachel explores both Chomsky's (1966) and Saussure's (1916) concepts of language and also makes exceptions before she states her position: *I think you're born into it then you acquire it but for someone else, for an adopted kid, for instance, they may acquire rather than being born into it. They can be from a different tribe and they become adopted and then they acquire the language. For me I'm born into that tribe; I'm born in that language. Maybe it's more of acquiring because you could be born into a language but you might not really learn it. Too much influence from other tribes or something of that sort.* Eben is equally convinced of the intimate nature of mother tongue. Like Kwaku Panin, he uses a cultural concept to shape his perception of mother tongue: *The language of my mother, that's what I always thought it to be. In the Aboriginal culture you're always accepted in your mother's home. Where your mother's born, that's where you always belong.* Eben's mother is English for which reason he looks upon the English language as his mother tongue, but his notion of mother tongue is based on the belief system of the Aboriginal community, his father's tribe; he sees himself first as an English person. Incidentally, all participants link mother tongue to their cultural roots,

where they feel they belong.

The significance of the utterances above lies in the fact that these young adults firmly identify with the minority cultures albeit being heavily influenced by Western culture, an inevitable consequence of the past marginalizing processes. They unanimously acknowledge that English heavily imposes on their respective native languages. In view of that acceptance the young adults' appreciation of the heavily imposed languages--and cultures--in a way defines the (post) colonial period for their respective cultures which have gone through nihilistic procedures over the centuries (Perley, 1993; Nichols, 1989; Ermine, 1995). The position taken by the young adults underscores the triumphant emergence of the minority cultures from the imperial hurricane that started sweeping through the corridors of these minority cultures many centuries ago, the fury of which has not completely died now. There might not be a glaring dichotomy between the colonial and the postcolonial periods but the acceptance of the minority cultures by these young adults implies a break in the hold of the dominant cultures. The young adults attempt to break the walls of silence and reconstruct their own spaces within the on-going struggle for dominance. Their allegiance to their languages and cultures might be a standard with which to measure the strength of the (former) colonized cultures.

### **Our Cultures are Resilient**

Cultures, like languages, need to be preserved as much by human agents as by organized systems that need not only be inherent to the culture but also be imperative for their smooth administration and subsequent survival. The (former) colonizer failed to appreciate in the colonized cultures the inherent systems therein. Apparently intelligent

communication, organization and administration, to mention only these, were features the colonizers could not associate with the oral cultures they came into contact with (Eze, 1997; Nichols, 1989; Kant, 1997). Such cultures have since come very close to being submerged by Western cultures in their quest to educate the former, then perceived as the very antithesis of the West (Eze, 1997; Said, 1994). Language symbolized a great deal for the would-be-colonized cultures at the onset of colonization; if the cultures were denied voice it would be an effective means to render inauthentic their worldviews (Nichols, 1989). Then the languages of captured cultures might not be heard above the din of the imperial march of conquests. The assumed connection between language and culture has held through the years. The cord that links language to cultures has not been severed. It ensures the double survival of oral languages and cultures. Thus the survival of one indirectly propels the other along. Conversely, destroying one spells the doom of the other. The participants for this study share the old ideology that culture is perpetuated through language. By implication, the participants stress the colonial strategy to silence oral cultures through language.

Subsequently, the young adults project their own theories about their native languages with a view to preserving their cultures; they express the importance of language to culture eloquently. Kwaku Ketewa, whose native language skills border on the colloquial, does not hesitate in saying: *Without language cultures become extinct so culture is perpetuated through language.* Kwaku Panin believes himself to be a fluent speaker of his mother tongue. He offers his opinion: *Culture is an entity; language is a component of culture. Language sells culture because to be able to express culture, you must be able to speak about it and not just speak about it but you must be able to bring*

*out the units and hows of culture. Somebody who belongs to a culture must be able to express himself or herself through the language of that culture. The act of speaking then becomes a means of exhibiting a way of life. Rachel continues in that train of thought: You lose your language, you lose your culture. You lose it, you lose your interest. You could learn about your culture but you really don't know it if you cannot explain it or cannot speak it.*

Eunice's opinion on language and culture does not differ that much from Rachel. She speaks from experience: *Well, language is the basis for culture. My dad's sister is about 68 and she's the one who teaches me about my traditional ways and stuff like that. She gets really frustrated with me because I can't really understand her. It's hard to translate meanings from Cree to English, because it doesn't mean the same thing; it's the same thing when she's teaching me about the traditional ways or how I'm supposed to be or how I'm supposed to act. She gets frustrated because she can explain things really well in Cree, but she can't explain them that well in English, so it's really hard to teach the younger people about tradition. That's why language's so important to culture because you need to know the language so you can know the culture.* Eunice acknowledges that one can learn about the culture even when one does not have a full grasp of one's mother tongue, yet she maintains that such a person would miss so much: *Well, you can learn a bit of the culture first without learning the language but if you are doing it the proper way it is first through the language because if you know the language then you are able to learn the culture that much more, right? If you do it the other way you get some of the culture but you are not going to learn all the necessary details. I don't know what people do everyday but I*

*know that is the way it should be. People should know the words, the meanings. Yes it is true that people learn the culture first but they don't learn the whole culture; they do all the observing and think they know what is going on but they don't.*

Rachel makes a point about her cultural experience that reiterates Eunice's point: *I actually got exposed to the culture and the language for me to understand it that way so if I didn't speak the language I probably wouldn't have been so much exposed to the culture.* Language does not perform that differently from Eben's point of view though he also sees other ways of getting to know one's culture. He says of language: *I think it is probably the link to understanding the culture in more detail. I don't see it as the only way to communicate because my grandmother never spoke English to me, but there are still other ways to show parts of our culture like non-verbal language.*

Yet he agrees that without a full grasp of the language one fails to grasp the culture. He uses the sweat ceremony, which happens to be an important segment of the Cree culture, to elaborate. Here is his own example: *I've been to a sweat where it's mostly been conducted in Cree. The head conductor who speaks or conducts the ceremony is Cree. Everything he did was in Cree. I didn't even fully understand why the ceremony was happening that way but I did know to share what we've been through as a family together and share the good times and the positive side of the memory or something, so the whole function helps to bring the family closer, so that's the huge part of the culture that you take back away with you, but there is still that part, the piece that completes the whole puzzle. If you could have that piece maybe it will all make sense in a different way.* He adds that the "piece" he needs to complete the puzzle would be provided thorough the language, if he spoke it fully. Thus the young adults

highlight the vital connection between language and culture.

That is not saying that there are no impediments; communication among members of the oral culture has been heavily impacted by the introduction of a second language. Also, unequal exposure to dominant and minority languages in the schools has resulted in minimal native language skills for some young adults as the dialogue at the beginning of this chapter attempts to illustrate. Limited vocabulary aside, young adults cannot grasp the art of oral language which includes appropriate register and speech decorum. Thus the influx of other languages and cultures has had a tremendous impact on these young adults from oral cultures; for one thing, indigenous people acquire fragmented knowledge of oral cultures. Eunice says: *When a culture loses its language, when a people lose their language, then all of a sudden it's kind of segmenting the culture. For example, the Cree nation comprises people who are really traditional, who really know their language, speak only Cree to people who could speak it and understand. Outside of that group are people like me who know a little bit, know some aspects of their culture but are not as intense about it as the people over here in the middle (using her hands to illustrate on the table), so it kind of divides and divides and further divides.*

If language use segments speakers into fluent speakers and the not-so-fluent ones, it also deregulates the ranks therein. Different speakers do not possess the same kind of linguistic skills. Even among traditionalists there are degrees of fluency; some are better than others. Speakers tend to be rated by the powers of oratory, apt use of symbolic expressions and speech decorum, among others. A speaker's ability to weave some or all of qualities together usually determines his/her fluency.

The traditionalists who invariably belong to older generations can boast of fluency probably based on their age and long years spent within their respective communities. The younger generations who are easily affected by migration might not have the opportunity of a lifetime spent within one language community. At best they can hope for occasional visits, as Eben, Rachel and Eunice explain. The concept of fluency, like most concepts, has therefore undergone a change of definition. Frank says: *So long as people understand what I try to communicate to them, I'm fluent.* Kwaku Panin agrees with him but only up to a certain point. He elaborates: *Except when you are among the traditionalists--the elders--then you need to know other aspects of the language such as proverbs, idiomatic expressions.* Kwaku Ketewa adds to the list: *You need to know other norms of the culture: drum language, principles of decorum, the oral arts too.* As Eunice earlier commented, one needs the language community to be able to master the language. But within the language community, fluency takes different shades: Akoto in the dialogue thinks herself fluent but when she appears before elders of her tribe she redefines her position and concedes fluency to the older ones. The same holds for the other young adults. The older ones appear to bridge the communicative gaps for the young adults.

Rachel sees one advantage in speaking her language well in that she is able to communicate with the elders in her family: *I feel like I can communicate with the older people.* The young adults link their elders and grandparents to fluency (Slattery, 1995); indirectly, they allude to the older ones as potential sources of knowledge for the young within that culture. However, the elders could also be utilized by the mainstream schools, as is the practice in some Canadian schools, which invite Aboriginal elders to

the classrooms to discuss the Aboriginal culture. That bond between language and culture appears to have a relay effect on the people within the culture. By forging a strong connection between language and culture the young adults also project their own links to their respective cultures and also manage to portray the strength of their mother tongue.

The core issue is that the young adults have managed to grasp something that is real to them. Despite education, urbanization and the economic and social pressures to invest in dominant languages and cultures, the young adults have a definite sense of identity, which they owe to their cultures. That acceptance is a strong indication of the strength of the former (colonized) cultures. They might still be oral cultures, they might have been marginalized beyond imaginable proportions, but they have held on and have emerged out of the colonizing process well. The past colonial processes might even be used to measure the resilience of the (former) colonized cultures. The colonizer was powerful, yet in quiet ways, the colonized were equally powerful; that power is exhibited through the hold such cultures currently have on the young ones.

Paradoxically, one of the means by which they have managed to remain alive is the colonizer's language, which also happens to be one major instrument of conquest. Dominant languages are being utilized to sustain the (former) colonized cultures (Nichols, 1989; Simonse, 1982). English has become a world language but it has also become a language that many a foreign speaker has adopted to suit his/her cultural environment (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998); as such it is no longer the (former) colonizer's prerogative. The (former) colonized has learnt the colonizer's language and can communicate at the colonizer's level. The existence of postcolonial theory, which

boasts of many writers from the former colonized cultures who critique various aspects of colonization through English or other dominant languages, is evidence enough of the reconstruction of socio-cultural spaces by the people who were conquered in the times past (Viswanathan, 1989).

Eben explains that Aboriginal people do not speak English in the same manner as native English speakers do. According to female Cree participants, such spoken differences sometimes render young Cree users of English a laughing stock within urbanized Cree young adults. Yet, Eben insists that such communicative differences are also going to help perpetuate the Cree culture. Cree people who learn to speak English do not have to sacrifice their natural and acquired Cree communicative skills. Native accent, as well as other Cree communicative characteristics, will continue to manifest itself as Cree people use English, hence, sustain various Cree identities. This contrasts with the period of the clash between written and oral cultures when neither could speak the other's language; currently, people from oral cultures have learnt and can communicate in dominant languages and vice versa. In so doing either group also defends its cultures, projects them as valid ways of life, hence preserves the said cultures.

Such progress notwithstanding, the struggle between cultures has all but ended. Certain ways of life have dominated various aspects of mainstream communication to such an extent that there is constant need to keep reminding young people about the relevance of holding on to their cultures. Knowing their roots as the participants do is not enough. The participants acknowledge the difficulties involved in holding on to their cultures. Being convinced that their cultures are also valid ways of knowing the world

might be a stronger motivation for the young adults to strive to project oral indigenous ways alongside dominant cultures. Certain aspects of oral languages underscore the authenticity of the oral ways of life. The following chapter discusses such aspects of oral languages.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **The Beauty of Our Differences**

Communication on both interpersonal and intercultural levels is probably one of the most beautiful aspects of human life; the beauty in language, the major communication link among humans, can easily be attested to by the diverse ways in which different socio-cultural groups utilize their languages to similar effects. Naturally, individuals tend to be proud of their cultural environment; belonging to dominant or minority social groups, people tend to manifest intelligence through their use of language. From apparently polarized angles human cultures must have more in common than people of a particular culture are aware of, hence the natural tendency to value the ways one has been born into, and to communicate intelligibly. Perhaps the fact that human cultures inhabit the same earth has something to do with that shared tendency; it might also be the fact that they are affected by the same issues--human relationships or lack of, (mis)management of power, the environment (pollution, health, to name only these) regardless of their geographical, cultural, social or racial position, that initiates such common concerns: "[W]e are all united by the air we breathe" (Ngugi wa Thiongo, 2000). Be it as it may, it could be expected that common human concerns would dominate intercultural relationships; rather, socio-cultural differences usually stand out. Hence what humans have in common often tends to be out-spaced by their differences.

Of the shared human elements, language appears to be one of, if not the, most

paradoxical. Language that engenders general human communication simultaneously creates the most seemingly insurmountable barriers among groups that cannot speak one another's language. Different languages effectively alienate one socio-cultural group from another. Remarkably, as soon as different groups make efforts to learn one another's language, the barriers that hitherto existed among them begin to be visibly lowered. It would appear then that cultures begin to have things in common once they start operating in a common communicative medium. However, once effective communication begins it can be surmised that human conduct, aspirations and concerns are not too dissimilar from one culture to another. It is probably upon that realization that certain cultural gaps begin to narrow. Thus exploring some of the differences among cultures might be beneficial. If language represents worldviews of cultures, then it makes a good starting point.

One aspect of language that sophisticatedly deals with perceptions of life is proverbs, riddles and idiomatic expressions also do: "Comparisons of proverbs found in various parts of the world show that the same kernel of wisdom may be gleaned under different cultural conditions and languages" (Proverbs, 2001). Thus it would be of interest to find out from speakers of different languages the inherent qualities they associate with proverbs, also what logical connections they make through proverbs vis-à-vis language. This might help to ascertain commonalities and differences that exist among such languages, and perhaps glean some aesthetic understanding from such differences. Connecting certain dominant and minor worldviews through language might be of great motivation to young adults from minor cultures who desire to invest or (re)invest in their native ways.

### **What the Young Adults have in Common**

Speakers of a particular language might usually not find challenges in the ordinary use of language. There comes a time, however, when one requires sophisticated utterances either to address a delicate situation or effect a pointed lesson in life. The young adults who were interviewed for this study accept that there is time for informal use of language and there is a time for its formal use. Usually they do not need help when using language on an informal basis, but they do when the occasion calls for a more mature handling of language as in before a certain audience. Kwaku Ketewa sums it up in this way: *Before elders words should be wrapped up in idiomatic expressions.* All the young adults associate sophistication and admirable language skills with proverbs, riddles and figurative expressions. They also acknowledge the importance of the older generation when it comes to proverbs, riddles and figurative expressions; the older generation appears to possess the kind of sophistication required for such extensive use of language. Also of great interest is the relevance the participants associate with grandparents. Variously they allude to their grandparents--and the older ones in general--as possessing fuller language skills than do young adults; hence, the young generation keeps tapping from that "grand" source (Slattery, 1995). That underscores the need to involve older, in other words, the experienced elders in the community.

The association of knowledge and communicative maturity with old age or a higher source such as oracles or sages is not a novel phenomenon. It appears to have been the practice in ancient times. Not only are proverbs revered, but some of the reasons for that reverence seem to have partly been based on their agelessness; severally, proverbs are linked with ancient or supernatural sources. Erasmus (1840/1982)

explains: “Proverbs get into popular speech either from the oracles of the gods...from the sayings of the sages...else they come from some *very ancient* poet” (italics mine), the significance apparently being that proverbs constitute such deep knowledge that it takes years of experience and observation to fashion them. Also they offer such practical and useful lessons about life, all of which cannot come from a child’s perspective.

It takes astuteness, endurance and patience to observe the ways of life in order to form generally applicable utterances. Additionally it requires maturity to appreciate such deep thoughts. Hence, not only do proverbs come from the old, mostly it also takes the old to effectively use them. Even so, not all old people are capable of appreciating such teaching gems, Erasmus points out. Inversely, then, proverbs could become a way of judging whether an older one possesses the wisdom befitting his or her age, that is, whether an older person is capable of handling serious aspects of life with the necessary astuteness. Though one need not be necessary for the other, in certain circumstances, living by the underlying principles of proverbs enhances one’s level of astuteness. Erasmus might have been describing characteristics that were associated with proverbs in the ancient times; however, such characteristics can also be located within the languages that were used for this study. Language users need to combine proverbs with other rhetorical aspects in order to legitimise their fluency. At least the participants made such points.

Different language groups define standards for acceptable communicative skills differently. Native speakers who desire to be counted among capable speakers must aspire to meet such set standards. Becky, quoted in the previous chapter, offers one such Cree standard and the expectation from the community: *Cree is a descriptive language;*

*things are explained in concepts instead of words.* Becky explains that contemporary Cree does not possess the equivalent vocabulary of English, in all situations, in spite of the fact that Cree has borrowed extensively from English vocabulary. It therefore befalls the Cree speaker, when using English vocabulary for which no direct translations exist in Cree, to locate such thoughts within the context of Cree. Speakers can manage that through simple Cree discourse. To Becky, a fluent Cree speaker should be able to shape foreign views into understandable Cree thoughts. A fluent speaker should also be able to use the right accent. A Cree elder agrees with Becky. Apparently, borrowing from a fast-growing language such as English has furthered the descriptive nature of Cree. Though this need not imply that other languages do not possess descriptive characteristics.

The situation is slightly different with the Twi language community in Ghana. Translation from Twi to English need not necessarily be in concepts, as it possibly happens in Cree; yet sometimes, a single utterance in English translates into a string of sentences in Twi, and vice versa, but that can also apply to other languages. A fluent speaker should necessarily be capable of oral discourses in Twi. The young adults from Ghana maintain that among a traditional audience attention is paid to register. Appreciative speech qualities include “knowing the appropriate diction to use for the appropriate occasion”, says Kwaku Ketewa. Appropriate diction among elders, according to the Ghanaian young adults, comprises mainly proverbs, idiomatic and figurative expressions. Kwaku Panin highlights the relevance of possessing full language skills: *Among the Asantes fluent language skills are criteria for eldership and kingship.* Like Cree speakers, the Asantes link communicative ability to their culture. Kwaku Panin continues: *I think idiomatic expressions, proverbs and figurative speech portray*

*the richness of the culture or the richness of the language.* Apparently rich here refers to deeper thoughts; an immature speaker would not be in a position to appreciate that.

Kwaku Panin highlights what is needed to grasp such deep meaning. In describing the role of the elders in his language he makes a remarkable connection between Twi and English: *Proverbs, idiomatic and figurative expressions are so deep it takes somebody who has really learnt or who has been taught or who has followed his language or culture to know what is inherent in such expressions. I will use an example. You know there are big words in English right. Sometimes you need the encyclopedia to get the meanings yes. Sometimes with some of our mediums and expressions you need your old people--your old men and women--in the family to explain them to you.* In the Akan traditional set-up, proverbs, figurative and idiomatic expressions fall into the requirements for fluency.

Asked for her indigenous perspective on fluency, Rachel also acknowledges the importance of proverbs, riddles and figurative expressions in her African languages. Coincidentally, she builds on the connection between English and oral languages: *Yes, proverbs, idiomatic and figurative expressions play a big part in our language. Proverbs actually have special meanings—I can't remember them now—and in Swahili everything is almost hidden in line. Swahili is full of proverbs; it is full of metaphors, which is very intriguing. I find that Swahili words ornamenting clothes are metaphoric. Each expression has a hidden meaning and we go through that in school on several occasions because most of the stories are like that. When you read Swahili stories they are like that. It's just like reading Shakespeare's work in English; you have to read in between the lines and Swahili is full of that.*

Subsequently not everyone understands such loaded expressions. Rachel continues: *When you get the old Swahili people who live in the Mombassa coast they speak Swahili mainly and every sentence that comes out of their mouth is a riddle. For those of us who live in the city their Swahili is almost hard to understand.* Becky does not leave out the elders in her story either. The older ones also serve as a learning source within the Cree language community. She explains with an example: *There is no Cree word for elephant, therefore my grandmother will explain, with gestures, the size of animal, features and other elements like the tusk, the shape of the ear and others.* Like the young adults from Ghana and Kenya, Mercy thinks that there are certain expressions that the elders use which her contemporaries cannot understand. In that sense then her generation does not possess as fully the communicative skills that their elders have acquired over the years.

The comments above stress the importance to the older generation of the language among the three language communities. Through the elders certain authentic elements of the language are preserved, such as their subtleties. Sometimes, a reader needs more than ordinary knowledge of English language to understand literary aspects such as symbolism and allusion--to name two—in Shakespeare's work. Dictionaries and encyclopaedias enrich readers' knowledge. Kwaku Panin and Rachel comparing the elders with such relevant aids maximize their appreciation of the role of older ones in the Akan, Kalinjin and Cree native languages and cultures.

At this juncture it is appropriate to solicit the opinion of some of the older generations as to what language constitutes for them, what skills are worth pursuing and how language differences can best be explored for unifying purposes.

### **Tapping from the Old**

Robin, the Cree elder, sees language as an all-encompassing concept; to him, language has a spiritual significance as well as a physical one. He says: *The Creator created all kinds of people*. He explains that the Creator put various kinds of people in different locations on the earth. These people are endowed with different gifts from their creator, one such gift being language. Coming from a particular location and speaking the language of the place renders one a bona fide member of the group belonging to that location. In the elder's opinion, language signifies special identity, something that every person ought to be thankful for. That thought runs through the discussion with an elder from Africa.

Nana is the elder from the Akan language community in Ghana. She says: *Of all the creator's creation, human beings have spoken language. Language is therefore a special gift from God. Not only does it differentiate human beings from other creations, it also identifies one socio-cultural group from another*. Thus the two elders share the notion of language as an identity. The elders, however, do not see the identity created by language as a mutually exclusive concept. Living in the same world makes reciprocity a necessary companion to special identities created through language. Thus Nana deplors the hostility that is sometimes generated by language differences. She explains the situation from a cultural viewpoint. Akan speakers who comprise about 42% of the Ghanaian population would be one socio-cultural group but for communicative differences; instead they now constitute about six language groups. She would rather have one large cultural group united by a common communicative medium. Others share Nana's desire for unity.

Robin acknowledges that different people have different beliefs, yet he also brings out the need for interdependence among cultures. He also speaks from cultural experience: *Traditional Cree adopted things from other cultures*. Among the elements Cree language had adopted from other cultures is the use of proverbs. Proverbs were introduced to the Cree language after the establishment of the residential school system, which accompanied Christianity: *Most of the proverbs are borrowed from the Bible; they are also borrowed from other cultures such as English*. In spite of the fact that proverbs were introduced to Cree rather late, they currently feature prominently in that language. *Cree proverbs*, according to the elder, *are borrowed expressions that have been localized*. Original Cree language, hardly spoken now, utilizes legends and stories. *“Cree elders also have lectures using the circle of life”*. Contemporary Cree has adopted proverbs but retained the legends and stories. In a way, the moral values inherent in the legends and stories make them the equivalents of proverbs, since proverbs generally render moral lessons about life. Some of the old legends and stories are embodied in the teachings of proverbs in contemporary Cree; in certain situations, legends and stories are used alternatively with proverbs.

Thus borrowing from other cultures has in a meandering manner ensured that Cree shares one important element of language with the Akan language, namely, proverbs, which in turn links Cree and Akan with other languages. A point worthy of note is that both languages associate proverbs with the elderly or the ancient, just as do other languages (Erasmus, 1540/1982). According to Robin, Cree language makes use of stock expressions like *“the old people say”* or *“our elders say”*. In much the same way, Akan proverb usage is usually preceded by a similar deferential expression: *“The elders*

say”. Nana volunteers another common expression among the Akans, which alludes to the good old days embodied in the exemplary lives of elders of the community, *Tete wo bi ka, tete wo bi kyere*, which literally translates, “the ancient has valuable things to say, the ancient has valuable things to teach”. It is not coincidental that the languages in question tend to associate proverbs with the elderly; that also appears to be a feature of proverbs (Erasmus, 1540/1982). This might explain the readiness of the young adults in this study to give certain communicative prerogatives to their elders. Such privileges fit so well with the general responsibilities of language communities discussed in Chapter Four (see subsection The Power the Language Communities, p. 98).

The communicative privileges invested in elders appear to follow the ideology that children ought to be seen and not heard, as the Cree elder pinpoints below. Asked about who has the right to tell stories or legends embodied in proverbs among the Cree community, he replies: *Elders or grown ups in the community, the oldest in the group: grandmother or grandfather or father or mother*. Nana from Ghana pursues that thought when she says of proverbs: *To understand proverbs a person has to be taught. You need to live with an older person--grandparents, the ancient ones*. Thus the young adults as well as the old people who were interviewed for this study share the sentiment that the young need to be taught by the old. The older ones, it appears, possess knowledge and experience that give them the right to serve as teachers. Yet that privilege allotted to elders comes with special responsibilities.

Respect and knowledge are not automatic companions of old age; they must be earned. That is another feature that Cree and Akan share with some ancient languages. Erasmus cautions against “impatiently thrusting aside [learning through proverbs] as

too humble, perfectly easy and too childish...it is by no means everyone who can make use of proverbs" (1974, p. 9). Similarly, Cree speakers are selective of the elders they honour in the community. Elder Robin describes the Cree image of elders: *Elders are always looked on to be on the right path. They are the embodiment of respect, wisdom, patience and integrity.* An elder has to possess these admirable qualities in order to be accorded due respect in the community. He continues: *Not everyone can fulfil the role of an elder.* Nana agrees that the Akans have the same expectation regarding eldership; she asserts that an elder who does not know proverbs has no place in the "palace". "Palace" symbolizes tradition or culture since all cultural practices are initiated, planned and executed there, it being the official residence of the king/chief, who also happens to be the figurehead of the tradition or culture. An elder who cannot use proverbs and other figurative expressions to teach the young ones will not have earned his or her place in the community.

It must be noted that both language communities have exceptions to the "rules" regarding eldership. The term "elder" sometimes becomes symbolic rather than honorific; young ones who pursue exemplary lives and display outstanding knowledge about the cultures are sometimes elevated to the rank of elders. Thus there are "elders" who are not necessarily old. The Akans even have a proverb to that effect: "*Se akwadaa hu ne nsa hohoro a one mpaninfoo to nsa didi*", which literally translates, "when a child masters the art of hand washing he eats from the same bowl as grown ups". This proverb is best understood within a certain context of the Akan culture: firstly, relatives and good friends usually eat from the same bowls or plates; secondly, children are supposed to be seen and not heard; and thirdly, adults know better. The proverb

originates from the simple hygienic consideration that a child, yet to grasp basic hygiene practices, had better eat by him/herself to forestall transmitting harmful germs to grown ups and others who might otherwise be fully observant of hygienic rules. Subsequently, the proverb accentuates the Akan community's flexibility towards rules and practices. Interestingly, it also harmonizes with the English adage: "To every rule there is an exception". Thus the proverb above illustrates that the Akan and Cree communities might fundamentally look on their elders as repositories of wisdom. Yet they do not reject the young as equally potential sources of knowledge. This notion is in line with postmodern curricula that seek to pull knowledgeable resources from both young and old, the educated and the unlearned (Slattery, 1995). Thus the two language communities might be highly adult-oriented ones, but they have not managed to stay completely unaffected by modern trends or contemporary ideologies.

Significantly, the elements that make the Cree and Akan language communities susceptible to criticism from the young adult participants of this study include the features they share with dominant and ancient cultures. Perley (1993) and Shohat (2000) describe the relationship that developed between colonial settler states and native dwellers of North America, Australia and New Zealand as internal colonialism; the African colonial situation typified classical colonialism. Yet, the colonized cultures practised their own colonialism. Fundamentally, European imperialists practised colonization on a racial basis. Neither were the colonized cultures entirely guiltless of ethnic colonialism. Both colonizer and colonized were, however, guilty of gender prejudices. Both groups mainly defined the world in terms of men (Lauter, 1984; Nichols, 1989), another feature they share with almost all ancient cultures. According to

Eze (1997), Aristotle defined a rational human being in terms of a Greek aristocratic male. Females did not feature in the worlds of both ancient and modern colonialists. The picture was no different in the world of the colonized either. Whilst the latter strenuously fights to come out from the sidelines, the females therein continue to be marginalized. Inevitably the responses of some female participants extended to the role of women in their communities.

Discussing the limited role that women play in the researcher's culture, Eunice adds that women perform some cultural roles in her culture. Yet the bigger picture she paints is not very welcoming: *Yes I have noticed that women do the background work; they do a lot of stuff but you just don't see it during the formal part but they do a lot of the preparation and stuff like that.* One of Rachel's criteria for differentiating between Kenyan tribes is the manner in which women are treated: *When you come to African tribes there are different ways in which women are seen in the society. I told you that under my tribe we have the Kalinjins, under the Kalinjins we have sub-tribes. If you look at other sub-tribes under Kalinjins, for instance, if you look at Nandi, the Nandis still put women in that submissive position whereas Marakuets put us on equal level with the men. It is different. In Nandi you're not supposed to answer back to your husband. In my tribe women are not seen that way. I grew up and saw my grandma a very strong woman; I see that in my mother, and I see the respect they get from the men, it kind of gives me an idea of who I really am. I compare that with other tribes and I see a difference; it kind of builds me.* Eunice and Rachel have diverse backgrounds; their oral cultures and colonial backgrounds basically unite them in this study. Being women from (former) colonized cultures invariably renders them multiple subjects of

oppression. First, they are victims of racial subjugation, then within their traditional settings, they are “relegated to second class status” (Lauter, 1984, p. 6) by their own men (Nichols, 1989).

In exploring the facets of colonization one comes across excellent examples of practices or acts that are ingrained in both dominant and minority cultures: female subjugation, undue silencing of children, to name two. Indirectly it also raises the question of power (mis)management in society, even if contemporary generations have made strident efforts in rectifying such situations (Shohat, 2000; Vishwanathan, 1989). (Mis)Handling of power inescapably raises animosity, culture, race or gender notwithstanding. Hence, in criticising the colonizer’s past acts the young adults simultaneously critique their own cultures; they unwittingly connect dominant and minority cultures. Then they offer suggestive remedies.

Voicing criticisms and offering suggestions mark a change for the cultures that are known for generally listening to adults; that speaks of a positive change from the past. In voicing one such suggestion, Eben inadvertently links the colonizer to the Cree culture: *A lot of my cousins in Sandy Bay understand Cree but they don’t speak it because when they go to school they communicate in English. Also, I think the paradigm that “children are seen not heard” has been incorporated in Sandy Bay and that’s never been one of Aboriginal ideology.* Eben then offers what he figures could be a rectifying step: *It is from the English and I think they have to get rid of that and maybe the children will start speaking more; not just listening and understanding but actually speaking it. They have to regain the old ideology that children are to be heard and seen.* Again, Eben's assertion concurs with Slattery's (1995) postmodern classroom

ideals which seek knowledge from all categories of people including the young. Eben agrees though that children should speak within limits, thus he is not advocating the contemporary practice of permissiveness under which pretext most parents fail to give needed direction or supervision to their children, another issue facing both dominant and minority cultures in many societies.

Critiquing dominant and minority cultures might ensure the objectivity Eben needs if he would not unduly victimize his Cree culture in order to perpetuate a monstrous image of the colonizer. If the other young adults perceive issues from similar perspectives they might equally appreciate the pitfalls in their cultures that might have contributed to the misdeeds of the colonizer. Eben's next comment explores that point to an extent. He refers to Cree language recovery: *I think the Aboriginal people have to shut off their TVs; I'm serious. The amount of TV watched plays a huge impact on how much time you spend doing cultural activities. When their children are watching TV they are not learning their language, they are not learning how to hunt, they are not learning how to live in the bush, not even what berries to pick, what plant, what seed; so that too plays a role. The Cree people have to turn off the television. Every house in the north has television now; they spend a lot of time getting influenced by what they see as being the culture that they would be accepted in. A lot of children in an Aboriginal community see their way of making it in the non-Aboriginal culture as things occur in these images, and TV images are very deceptive.*

Eben elaborates on the urgent need to cut down on the amount of TV watched; he puts in a word for the dominant cultures too: *With the violence and the sex and these issues that they are supposed to be portraying or teaching, they are actually observing*

*behaviours that are the wrong ways to incorporate non-Aboriginal culture. They are living on the reserve; they're not actually seeing how people live in the urban communities, how people really act and how the children really maintain themselves. They are getting a watered-down version of the non-Aboriginal culture; they have to shut off that TV.* Eben is not prescribing a reclusive existence for the Aboriginal people; he advocates moderation when it comes to watching dominant images; in other words, parents should spend time with their children rather than letting them loose in front of television sets (Mander, 1991). Spending time together might constitute the major avenue to teaching young ones about their culture.

Criticizing their native communities probably helps to remind the young adults of the roles they also have to play if they would avoid replicating colonial patterns. Kwaku Panin tells of his private acts to preserve his language skills whilst in Canada; what is more, he realizes results: *I have been taught a whole lot of things; I try to keep them and I try to keep my language that's why most of the time I try to speak my language in order to keep some expressions. I also listen to music--I have a whole bunch of CDs, audio cassettes--all in the local language. So I think I'm good.* Eunice also sees hope for the language if young and upcoming are to take it seriously: *I don't know; we would need more people who know the language, I guess; it would take more young people who are willing to learn the language and use--speak--it like I do, so that it would not be lost.*

Asked whether losing mother tongue in contemporary times should be a concern to Kenyan young adults, Rachel answers in the affirmative: *Yes it should be of concern. It's different for me being in Canada but a Kenyan being in Kenya and losing his or her*

*mother tongue--that's a problem. That's what they should be working on now. She pinpoints one source of the problem: Parents encouraging their kids; they know they are supposed to know their language, their culture and I believe they should do it but now Kenyan parents are so busy with work, they are so busy trying to make money, but this should not close their mind.* Thus all the participants acknowledge that their native communities are also implicated in the language crisis. The older ones in the societies ought to make the language and culture worthwhile investments for the young ones. Not every older person can boast of full participation towards such cultural projection.

In the comments above lies the point that the young adults from (former) colonies recognize foibles in the (former) colonizing cultures and in their own. For criticism to be effective it has to adequately address various aspects of whichever issue is being criticized. An effective way of doing this is to consider issues from a range of dimensions. That ensures balanced exploration of the situation at hand; then authentic solutions might result. Human beings tend to share the desire for power; one therefore often finds that even victims of suppression tend to be implicated in oppression (Abramova, 1979). Hence, on issues of colonization, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to isolate the totally guilty from the completely innocent. Both colonizer and colonized contributed to the development of the past marginalizing processes. Thus the complexity of the colonial processes is that it has evolved into an encompassing issue, which currently barely leaves out a group. The comments made in the previous chapter indicate that people from minority cultures have to learn to imbibe both native and oral cultures (see Chapter Four, A Complex Situation, p.95); alternatively, dominant cultures must also learn to dignify minor cultures. Essentially everyone has

something to contribute.

Therein lies the supposition that both dominant and minority cultures have immense capacities for imparting knowledge to the inexperienced that care to know. Again the issue is to learn to live with both, appreciate each for its admirable qualities and assist to rectify the transgressions that threaten social harmony. There are numerous reasons for the desire to rectify past atrocities committed through colonization. Perhaps the fact that several centuries after the commencement of colonization generations that have nothing to do with the original acts of suppression are being compelled to live with the consequences is probably one of the best motivations to pursue harmonious relationships. The following section introduces a proverb that aptly teaches that the innocent can reap the result of the predecessors' undesirable policies.

### **Making Connections**

One of the aims of this study is to establish connections through a proverb among the languages being used for reference in this study. The proverb chosen is "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge". Probably originating from Hebrew<sup>10</sup>, the proverb has outlived the Greek and Roman civilizations and can currently be located in the English language. Since the oral languages under discussion have colonial connections with English, the idea is to explore the possibility of all four languages having similar versions or interpretations of the proverb; a subsequent task then will be to compare the meanings associated with the proverb.

Elder Robin could not locate the proverb in the Cree language, not because proverbs do not feature in original Cree. Rather, he admits that he is not familiar with all the proverbs in his native language. That admission indicates that in spite of the elders'

extensive knowledge about the language, they also have their limitations. Elder Robin readily admitted that other elders in his locality might easily give me the Cree version of the proverb. The researcher could not talk to other elders because of time constraints. Rachel's inability to locate the proverb within the Kalenjin language is further proof of the communicative limitations of the younger generations. She believes that the older people in her homeland, or her grandparents would know the equivalent of the proverb, but she does not. Knowing the great role proverbs play in African languages, the researcher is also fairly certain that the both Kalinjin and Swahili have the equivalents of the proverb used for this study.

As a means of communication this proverb validates the points earlier made about different language skills being exhibited by the young adults and the elderly. The young adults unanimously agree that their languages might have versions of the proverb but they could not remember any offhand. That acceptance is significant for two reasons: first it emphasizes the point made about young ones possessing limited language skills; secondly, it validates the elders' position as ones possessing fuller language skills to whom young ones can turn for enlightenment. Inability to locate the proverb within their cultural setting did not prevent the young adults from working out some meanings for the proverb. There was consensus that among other things the proverb teaches a lesson about action and chain-reaction. The elders however lived up to the expectation and expanded on the meaning of the proverb.

Elder Robin interprets the proverb philosophically. He does not refer directly to the proverb but he said that people have to make choices in life. If one expects good results then one has to sow good seeds. A bad act can only result in bad yields. One

needs to keep that principle in mind when one makes major decisions in life; failure to consider the future implications of one's actions might result in unnecessary hardship. Linking his thought to the proverb above, the elder further explains that consequences of one's acts might not only affect the one that initiates certain unwelcoming acts. Thus innocent generations might end up paying for the bad deeds of an ancestor. Conversely, a good deed can initiate a peaceful path for one's descendants. The Cree elder emphasizes that invariably everyone has to make such a choice.

Nana from Ghana gives an Akan version of the English proverb that echoes the thought above: *Okotre akodi ne mako, aponkyerene na ehyehye no*, which literally translates as, "The lizard has eaten its pepper, the frog experiences the hot sensation". That proverb is carved from the habits of the two creatures. The lizard eats pepper but appears not to suffer the usual burning sensation that accompanies pepper, whereas the frog by its nature is always making throaty sounds as if it is taking in breeze to cool the burning sensations of pepper in its mouth. Once again the moral lesson is that innocent ones can bear the consequences of another's actions; in other words, actions can have spill-over effects. Nana says that one has to be careful else one can cause disgrace not only for oneself but also for one's associates or descendants. On the contrary, if one leads a good life one leaves behind a good name for future connections. She emphasizes the point that people do not usually desire to associate with people who have dubious backgrounds or ancestry. She also situates the proverb in a cultural setting. If a person does not invest in the culture through the language, when that person becomes old, he or she cannot help advise or teach the ways of the culture to young ones who might look up to such a person for guidance. The young ones in question will have lost out on the

culture due to the negligence or irresponsibility of the older person who failed to learn. Consequently such an older one would not command the respect that usually comes with age.

One fascinating aspect of proverbs is the manner in which they are variously linked to situations in life. The didactic element of proverbs appears not to fail to manifest itself in whichever language it appears, which probably explains their presence in all known languages. Thus both elders and young ones make broad interpretations from one proverb but basically underscore the same moral lesson. The connection through this proverb comes through associated meaning, as the comments from the young adults and two elders diversely illustrate; it also comes through the sources, among others. The English and Akan version of the proverb are carved from similar imagery. Habits of people and animals are observed and turned into a practical saying about life. Nana elaborates on that point: *Proverbs come from experience; they are shaped out of the language. Circumstances, specific contexts, practical situations are fashioned into proverbs.* An intriguing element of proverbs is their versatility; no one proverb is limited to a particular (life) situation. That is the reason Kwaku Panin refers to them as the rich intents of a language: *These proverbs—also figurative or idiomatic expression--can be linked to a whole bunch of situations. It could be used to advise maybe the young adults, it could be used for political figures, it could be for anybody.* Hence, in whatever context a proverb appears it does not lose its didacticism. Appropriately then this chapter concludes by applying the proverb to the (post)colonial situation.

## **Learning From Antiquity**

None of the generations that started and implemented colonialism in its many forms is alive today, yet their actions continue to affect contemporary generations, most of which have no clear understanding of the processes that have resulted in current situations in which they find themselves. The effects of colonialism have tentacled human relationships in the areas of politics, education, entertainment and economics. Enormous human and economic resources are being expended in order to counter the disastrous consequences of past colonial acts. The label 'colonizer' is not a flattering one, yet certain cultures must bear it because of conflict-ridden policies their predecessors initiated and executed. Such cultures continue to be associated with nihilistic tendencies; evidently the passage of time has not adequately diminished the disdain that accompanies colonization, at least from the viewpoint of the suppressed.

An uncomplimentary image of the (former) colonizer, however, does not imply a flattering one for the (former) colonized whose descendants must continuously grapple with social condescension due to inaccurate assertions that were made about their cultures centuries ago. Evidently the two elders are right; one needs to make prudent choices in life. Good deeds result in good reputations; bad deeds yield contempt and discord. Apparently the magnitude of an action determines its effects; hence colonization, a nihilistic process, is turning out to have timeless consequences for all parties involved. Indeed, perpetrators of bad policies are not the only ones that suffer, if they do; their acts usually tend to have implications for unborn generations as well.

That is a worthwhile lesson in life for the descendants of both colonizer and the colonized in current efforts to combat colonialism. If issues are pursued with the right

motives they might culminate in long-term benefits; if they are motivated by selfish objectives they might exacerbate an already inflammable situation. A world of wisdom reposes in the single proverb: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”. That world encompasses both oral and written cultures or dominant and minority cultures. Whether situated in the English, Akan, Cree or Kalenjin language and culture, the proverb has an immense potential to guide certain decisions in life. Nana sums things up thus: *Proverbs are different means of getting to the same avenue.*

Indeed proverbs are convergent zones for multiple ways of knowing. Put that way, the four languages are not so distanced from one another by their difference; rather they achieve a certain amount of unity that simply emanates from the intelligence displayed by each communicative medium. Amidst conspicuous differences there is unity: therein lies the beauty of the differences.

Ultimately the lesson about proverbs might also aid young adults from (former) colonized cultures into cultivating deeper appreciation for their native ways. Knowing that both minority and dominant languages and cultures have the same potential to teach about the world could motivate such young adults into exploring their indigenous minority cultures even as they strive for equal chances in mainstream or dominant societies. Striving for the best of both worlds might be a more fulfilling path than investing in a half of the possibilities the world offers. Most importantly, equally projecting minority cultures might constitute a very tangible move from the colonial era into the postcolonial one.

## CHAPTER SIX

### A Theory in Dilemma

*Rigid enforcement of antique decorum will help neither language,  
literature nor literati (James Sledd).*

The struggle among cultures has apparently always been predicated by the desire of individual cultures not only to authenticate their ways of knowing the world but also to claim the right to teach others about the world through such known ways (Gandhi, 1998; Nichols, 1989; Ermine, 1995; Hegel, 1997). Throughout its history colonizing cultures usually get the opportunity to voice such hegemonic desires (Eze, 1997; Nichols, 1989); however, it might rightly be concluded that the marginalized cultures would not differ that much from the former in taking pride in their own cultures, albeit at hushed levels (Ermine, 1995). Nichols (1989) alludes to "the silencing of the other from the opposite side of the equation" in a conversation in which an "African chieftain considers the language of the colonizing other ...unimportant" (p. 18). The point of interest here is hearing directly from an African, since it is probably in hearing the voices of the previously silenced ones that one can see most tangible changes in the (post)colonial processes (Simonse, 1982). The former colonized get more vocal by the day (Boer, 2002; Equiano, 1988; Said, 1994; Vishwanathan, 1989); yet the debate is not necessarily limited to race and culture. What is more, the issue is not limited to a simple binary concept of the colonizer as against the colonized (Bahri, 1996).

Colonialism has evolved into a medusa that appears to multiply in conflict to every solution that is found; consequently, there is the constant need for simultaneous strategies that might effectively handle (post)colonial conflicts and stimulate enthusiasm towards socio-cultural harmony, not by mere acknowledgement of, but through genuine respect for, all cultures. European exploration was mainly a masculine endeavour, the historical location of which is synonymous with the marginalization of most women on the continents of Africa, Europe and North America (Lauter, 1984). In view of this, the study at some point refers to the colonizers in the masculine gender, in reference to a period which silences minority cultures and females in Europe, Africa and North America. With the demise of formal colonialism, the former colonized cultures, women and even children have increasingly gained voice in both minority and dominant societies, hence the researcher's use of s/he to refer to the previously colonized cultures when the discussion pertains to the time period during which the "other" voices are also being heard.

Current controversies surrounding (post)colonialism cannot be traced to any one source; they are the natural consequences of discordant decisions taken in historical moments (Beattie, 1997; Hegel, 1997), cultures cohabiting and the unquenchable human need to intermingle. Whereas it might be argued that the three issues occurred gradually and separately in the past, present generations are experiencing their composite outcomes, the positive and negative implications of which increasingly complicate issues for all affected cultures. From all indications, the decision to colonize certain cultures was a highly litigious one; it presupposed socio-cultural discord between the colonizer and the colonized, even if that situation had possibly not been immediately

envisaged at the time colonizing cultures embarked on their crusade for cultural conquest (Hegel, 1997). Apparently prominent elements of a harmonious relationship, respect, dignity, trust, empathy, tolerance and fairness, could not be part of any transactions that would promote colonization (Hookimaw-Witt, 1998; Said, 1994). Rather, the whole undertaking of colonialism would be propelled by ethnocentrism and/or xenophobia and sheer racial patronage (Hume, 1997; Jefferson, 1997; Kant, 1997). The inhuman degradation that was physically and psychologically heaped on certain groups by others created a socio-cultural gap that would simply not be bridged by the formal ending of colonialism. Colonization continues to haunt its executors and victims from its grave; the trauma of the past tumultuous centuries persistently preoccupies surviving generations. Hence colonization continues to dent whatever dignified relationships the (former) colonizer and the (former) colonized progressively attempt to build.

A significant and an inevitable outcome of modern colonization has been the cohabiting of the colonizer and the colonized. Whichever continent witnessed active colonization in the past continues to serve as a dwelling place for the former rulers and the former ruled. The presence of both African-Americans and European settlers in the United States of America, the co-existence of Aborigines and ex-colonial settlers in the rest of the Americas, Australia and New Zealand attest to that; neither has Africa nor the former oriental colonies been able to re-construct societies that live independently of the former colonizer. Turbulence would probably aptly describe any such coexistence yet it must be acknowledged that much progress has been made through such turbulence; the former silenced can now be heard (Education, Creativity, 2001; Simonsen, 1982;

Vishwanathan, 1989). To a very large extent, the disruptive nature of colonization easily makes any racial and/or cultural harmony between affected groups attainable, mostly amidst chaos. For the people who were taken away from their land and transported to other lands, the mere demise of geographical colonialism could not relocate them to their roots. The journey of living spaces being constructed for such ones had merely begun.

An irreversible damage was done when one group of people was forcibly uprooted from their original geographical roots, their natural habitat, and relocated to foreign ones (Equiano, 1988; Kant, 1997). Phillips, (1985) describes the circumstances of such compulsory emigration: “[T]he slave was an outsider. The slave... was most often outside the kinship structure of the dominant society, thereby deprived of family ties and ability to form them, and deprived of any links with the host society...” (p. 6). One natural result would be a disorientation of both physical and intellectual dimensions (Equiano, 1988), a by-product of which might be the current identity crises that continues to plague African-Americans in the United States. The issue of identity crises occupies a significant position in African-American (post)colonial debates. Critiquing colonial ideologies that prescribe one-dimensional identities for blacks, thus detracting somewhat from the humanness and complexity of black personality, hooks (1998) writes: "Part of our struggle for radical black subjectivity is the quest to find ways to construct self and identity that are oppositional and liberatory" (p. 133). Speaking from postmodernist perspectives, hooks cautions against deceptive policies or theories that claim to be liberatory since they can also be colonizing agencies: “Postmodern discourses are often exclusionary even as they call attention to, appropriate even, the

experience of 'difference' and 'otherness' to provide oppositional political meaning, legitimacy and immediacy when they are accused of lacking concrete evidence" (p. 130). The history of the African-American within the American culture illustrates this paradoxical concept of inclusion and exclusion.

For the African who was transported to the American continent, cohabiting with the (former) colonizer would not be a choice; it had become an inevitable consequence. They had lost their original homelands through slavery. If the former slaves could not be sent back to Africa, their original homes, they would have to carve new roots among the very people who were responsible for their losing their homes. However, with the ending of the slave trade, former slaves and the former slave owners would begin new relationships that would grudgingly seek to give equal status to both colonizer and colonized, at least in theory. That type of co-existence could not have suited either party. Thomas Jefferson, probably speculates aptly for the African involved in this situation:

[I]f a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labour for another; in which he must lock up the faculties of his nature, contribute as far as depends on his individual endeavours to the evanishment [sic] of the human race or entail his own miserable condition on the endless generations proceeding from him. (1997, p. 96)

Jefferson probably speaks for the former slave owner as well. Having detailed readers about the features that render the African inferior, he cautions his fellow colonizers:

[The] unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people....Among the

Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture. (p. 103)

Jefferson's statement offers some insight into the nature of emancipation that the former slaves might anticipate. If slavery ended, it might be in theory only. The ideology that began and perpetuated black slavery would still be operating for some among the colonizing group (Kant, 1997). Hence Africans would be granted some free space within the American culture after the slave trade, yet that *free space* would still be very much an enslaved one. An enslaved space would progressively and diversely impact on the identity of the "freed" black within the new American multi-cultural relationship, if one might consider other cultures that have since become part of the American society.

If slaves in the then America might merely look forward to an act of emancipation that might not appreciably improve their social and human standards within that society, then they may also be prepared for evolving policies and theories that might likewise appear to liberate but in reality perpetuate colonization (hooks, 1998; The Culture Collective; 1995; Vishwanathan, 1989). Thus one might not be far from right in reckoning that the current conflicts surrounding postcolonial discussions commenced even before steps to end formal colonialism began in those centuries. Sometimes conflicts evolve out of existing problems before resolutions can be found for them, or perhaps such conflicts tend to be the result of contentious approaches to urgent situations. Either way, offering the once-conquered people *freedom*, theoretically enslaved, could only prolong the socio-cultural animosity between the former rulers and

the former ruled that would inevitably need to be thrashed out in ways other than mere declaration of emancipation for the formerly annexed black people. Of particular interest would be the means through which the kind of subtle colonialism which Jefferson's *proposition of freedom* for blacks in America raises, may have been addressed. Thus after emancipation the grounds would be far from even. Not only would the former ruled need to raise themselves from the social dust into which slavery had uncompromisingly placed them (Richardson, 1994), but verbal aspersions hitherto cast on the enslaved cultures would necessitate a show of potential intelligence from the ones once dismissed as lacking in intelligence and godly understanding (Hegel, 1997; Kant, 1997).

### **The Paradox of Formal Education**

Learning appears to be an inherent characteristic of cultures, oral or written, for it is the avenue through which knowledge is imparted to young ones. Subsequently one area in which the African might be able to prove his or her intelligence would be in the area of (formal) education, which would also imply contesting with the former colonizer in his own terrain. Coming from oral cultures that operated different learning systems (Bown, 1973; Ermine, 1995; Miller, 1990), exploring formal education, which thrives on writing, would constitute another direct entry into the colonizer's world, this time however, on intellectual levels<sup>11</sup>. If the African could "pass" the intelligence test through Western education, introduced by the (former) colonizer, that might salvage the battered African image; it might bring the former colonized to a certain line of equal intellectual exchange; then both colonizer and colonized might speak the "same language", at least on certain issues<sup>12</sup> (Equiano, 1988). Then the process of raising socio-cultural barriers might gradually begin. Thus formal education becomes an unintended sub-plot of

colonization.

However, entering the colonizer's world through formal education would immediately raise the question as to what impact the new culture could also have on the African personality and mentality and whether appreciation levels would be the same for both primary and secondary cultures by the time the African became well versed in formal education, vis-à-vis Western worldviews (Ngugi, 2000). In other words, from the onset, formal education had the potential to either elevate the colonized African to human dignity and correct erroneous ideologies about black(ness), or serve as an agency through which the colonizer might continue to hold subtle dominance over "other" culture(s). Most crucially, there existed the possibility that formal education might colour issues for Africans within the colonizing culture, making the beneficiaries kowtow to colonial ideologies and subsequently assume a colonial stance towards their primary cultures (Edwards, 1990; Equiano, 1988). If the latter occurred, the former colonized might have turned out to be a local colonizer that might replicate colonial patterns; s/he might then make it difficult to draw a simple line between the colonizer and the colonized, because the lines will have been blurred, giving different dimensions to internal colonialism (Perley, 1993; Shohat, 2000).

The arguments above also hold for Aboriginal people in different contexts. The years have probably highlighted the issues mentioned above; it is not the aim of this study to determine how successfully or otherwise such issues have either emerged or been dealt with. However, the points raised are purported to indicate how (post)colonial conflicts might have diversely developed over the years. African-Americans have been used to emphasise certain aspects of the controversy surrounding (post)colonial

discussion; however, the issues apply equally to colonized cultures elsewhere, with variations from one culture to another.

That the colonized would be taught through the colonizer's language heightens the implications of Western education for (post)colonial debates. Language would not be a neutral tool in imparting education to the colonized. The colonizer's language would be an outlet for his intellectual capabilities: "[I]t has always been clear that the normal everyday use of language involves intellectual abilities of the highest order" (Chomsky, 1966, p. ix). Again, the colonizer's language would constitute the complex nature of his "arbitrary" communicative systems (Saussure, 1916); it would also embody the rules and regulations that shaped the perceptions of a particular socio-cultural group, in this case the colonizer: "Language is what makes people what they are" (Zepeda, as quoted in Gurza, 2000, p. 1). In short, the colonizer's language would powerfully manifest the worldview of the colonizer. The last point might be illustrated through Ermine's (1995) Aboriginal language perspective: "Our Aboriginal languages and culture contain the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors, and it is critical that we examine the inherent concepts in our lexicons to develop understanding of the self in relation to existence" (p. 104); language would thus be one of the physical as well as psychological signifiers of what empowers the colonizer (Saussure, 1916). Thus, even under willing circumstances, the former colonized who would learn through the communicative medium of the colonizer would be faced with two alternatives; s/he would either learn the new language whilst managing to hold onto his or her own (Bown, 1973; Miller, 1990) or lose the primary language in the process of acquiring a secondary one. "One of the signs of the gradual death of a language is when young people are more fluent in [their second

language] and acquire only minimal proficiency in their indigenous language, if at all” (Blair, 1997, p. 4).

If the latter scenario became a reality, it would constitute a real threat to the former colonized cultures because they would be losing their worldview (Burnaby, 1986). Thus, the colonized acquiring formal education constituted serious socio-cultural implications, for education would carry its own absolutistic implications that would later help authenticate debates on (mis)management of differences between both colonizing and colonized cultures on one hand (Gandhi, 1998), and among the former colonized on the other. It appears then that with every attempt at rectifying one situation, entangling issues are unwittingly raised that would further the controversies of colonization. As if the situation were not complex enough with formal education, in some situations, certain agencies would launch destructive attacks on indigenous languages.

Formal education appears to have been extra costly, culturally, to the North American Aboriginal in the past; in spite of the threatening communicative implications of learning through the (former) colonizer’s language, there were deliberate attempts to annihilate Aboriginal languages (Haig-Brown, 1988; Miller, 1996). For North American Aboriginals, then, the alternative to learning the colonizer’s language whilst clutching on to his primary one appears to have been withheld.

Mainstream United States declared war on Aboriginal languages for their supposed lack of sophistication: “Their barbarous dialect should be blotted out and the English language substituted” (Gurza, 2000, p. 2). In Canada, Aboriginal children would be forbidden to speak their own languages: “The use of Aboriginal languages was discouraged and severally punished by the missionaries” (Perley, 1993, p. 123). These

are but two examples of extensive documentation on the attempt to wipe out Aboriginal languages in North America. One result of such attacks is the extinction of many Aboriginal languages and the endangered status of some existing ones (Bonvillain, 1993; Frideres & Reeves, 1993). Making reference to past struggles is not purported to undermine the positive impact of formal education; contrarily, one of the aims of this study is to highlight the extent to which some persons from the former colonized cultures have worked towards level grounds within mainstream cultures through formal education. Formal education has been one major avenue through which the (former) colonized have manifested remarkable intellectual achievements (Simonse, 1982). Subsequently it has also laid the grounds for the colonizer and the colonized to intermingle on much more equalised levels (Ngugi, 2000).

The pursuit of formal education has given impetus to the quest for progressive knowledge which has in turn contributed in no small way to the ever compounding (post)colonial processes. European exploration into the continents of Africa and America in all probability originated from motives other than cultural annexation. Abramova (1979) offers an opinion on the initial European exploration of the West African coast: “[T]he capture of slaves was not the main object of the first [European] expeditions” (p. 16); Phillips (1985) appears to share that sentiment: “[T]he search for slaves was a rather low item on their list of priorities for maritime expansion” (p.131). He further states what probably was the main agenda at the time: “Gold and grain were what they most eagerly sought” (p. 131). Explorers might also have been prompted by a sense of adventure and the quest to find out more about the world of which they were part (Eze, 1997; Hegel, 1997); different reasons exists for colonizing various continents.

Slavery then probably became a by-product of subsequent expeditions, that is, after European explorers encountered foreign human and natural resources and found themselves inadequate to handle the ensuing differences respectfully. Of course, one must never rule out the commercial prospects of such undertakings at the time (Phillips, 1985) nor the impact of capitalism on colonization (Boer, 2002; Gandhi, 1998). The above factors notwithstanding, the explorers' inability to handle differences ably, upon contact with then unknown cultures, culminated in gross mistreatment of "human rights", the justification of which can never be discovered.

Yet the dismal handling of socio-cultural differences during European exploration does not necessarily condemn the European quest for exploring; neither does it imply that it is wrong for people from different cultures to get together and possibly coexist. Fortunately, the past negative experiences have not quenched the desire in people from various cultures to want to know about others. The resilience of human nature is sometimes exemplified in human perseverance; bad decisions or lack of fine "policy" in certain human undertakings do not necessarily infer the failure of such endeavours. Sometimes persistence is needed to improve on foiled attempts; that is probably one effective avenue through which humans have made gigantic progress in various fields of endeavour over the years. Under different circumstances, European exploration could have immediately affected harmony among different cultures in more ways than one. As people travelled and discovered one culture or group of people after another, they might have learnt about one another's ways, complementing human knowledge per the differences even as they explored the world (Ngugi, 2000; Hegel, 1997). Sadly, commercialisation and unbridled quest for power triumphed over human

dignity and fair dealings; hence, most cultures do not possess histories of harmonious co-existence with other cultures. Paradoxically, formal education that became strategic in perpetuating European imperialism did somewhat contribute towards bridging the huge gap that colonialism created over the years; people from dominant and minority cultures can now mingle within various academic orbs. What is more, the former silenced are allowed much room to speak. In other words, the people who were once considered incapable of language, the ones who made “noise” rather than speak, are now considered worth listening to (Nichols, 1989; Richardson, 1994). Consequently, formal education is one of the current institutions ensuring that socio-cultural differences are handled with more sensitivity than they were in former times.

Colonialism and the imposed nature of formal education notwithstanding, people from colonized cultures have persevered in Western education; subsequently numerous academics with colonial backgrounds have learnt the colonizer’s language and currently communicate through the dominant discourse (Simonse, 1982). A Canadian Aboriginal male who has seen the benefits of holding on to his native language whilst utilizing his secondary one for a career, amongst others, can write: “Of all the gifts Europeans brought to our land, the greatest has to be the English language” (Education, Creativity, 2001). Olaudah Equiano, a former black slave, learned English in order to write his autobiography in the eighteenth century, a field of endeavour mainly the domain of white males at the time (Williams & Chrisman, 1994). Such apparent progress notwithstanding, contact with formal education renders the stand of the (former) colonized’s a rather delicate one.

Logically, operating through Western language renders a neutral or undiluted

critique of (post)colonial issues an impossibility for the (former) colonized (Shohat, 2000). As they brave the powerful currents of (post)colonial conflicts, (former) colonized scholars complicate issues with their own “dubious” placement within the Western scholarly environment (Ngugi, 2000; Shohat, 2000), a not unexpected outcome of pursuing knowledge through the (former) colonizer’s language (Ermine, 1995; Said, 1994). Scholars from colonial backgrounds acknowledge the delicacy of their placement within Western scholarly settings; thus as they critique the spaces that have been constructed and are being reconstructed for them, they conversely critique their complicit stances (Ngugi, 2000; Shohat, 2000). Most significantly, the hybrid nature of postcolonial debates make it possible for the scholars engaged in its study to explore a great variety of subjects (Bahri, 1996; Boer, 2002; Gandhi, 1998), a chance for the former colonizer to make intellectual contributions, thus helping to further answer the question of the intellectual capabilities of people from the (former) colonized cultures (Nichols, 1989; Richardson, 1994).

Participants for this study, all pursuing post-secondary education, admit that access to formal education enhances their mobility within mainstream societies, academe or otherwise. It can therefore be safely speculated that (post)colonial studies is predominantly an academic exercise (Boer, 2002; Gandhi, 1998). However, non-academic concerns play no less a noteworthy role in (post)colonial debates (hooks, 1998). Ironic as it might appear that the (former) colonized would be so intimately drawn into formal education, it must be acknowledged that for their voices to travel far, they need to communicate in the medium that will grant them maximum audience (Hirabayashi, 1978; Nichols, 1989; Simonse, 1982). There are other genuine reasons for

the (former) colonized to communicate in dominant languages; one must constantly consider the cultural implications. Documentation, a major tool of formal education, is currently being heavily utilized to preserve aspects of oral cultures (Education, Creativity, 2001; A Scholar, 2001; Gurza, 2000). The debate on (post)colonialism thus transcends the simple binary colonized and colonizer, albeit in different contexts, for as Phillips (1985) writes, “[a]t one time or another [colonialism] has touched practically every society...” (p. 6).

One therefore appreciates certain African-American scholars' insistence on critiquing the past and present colonial issues, which diversely affect the positioning of African-Americans within the American culture. With time the controversy surrounding Africans in American society has widened to encompass other aspects of life; it has transcended the literal slave experience. Hooks (1995) insists: "[R]acism is perpetuated when blackness is associated solely with concrete gut level experience conceived as either opposing or having no connection to abstract thinking and the production of critical theory" (p. 130). For the postcolonial academician, hook's assertion opens up opportunities for intellectual exploits, which enable one to link theory to real life situations. hooks' insistence also extends the fertile grounds for postcolonial discourse, not only for the African-American, but also for numerous other groups, for the African-American situation far from implies that others groups are also not struggling for stabilized identities (Harrington et al., 2000; Kristeva, 1998; Lacan, 1949) or seeking avenues for socio-cultural harmony.

### **A Controversial Relationship**

Neither have colonized groups in other continents had easy transition from

formal colonial era to politically or culturally independent existence. Cultures who were colonized on their native lands--Africa, Asia and the Americas--have equally had to occupy spaces constructed for them over the years (Bonvillian, 1993; Ermine, 1995; Nichols 1989). In scenarios not dissimilar to that of the African-American situation, the act of relinquishing geographical boundaries by the colonizer did not spare indigenous Africans, Asians and others from equally delicate choices in the areas of language, education, politics and economic choices which have not reflected complete emergence from the threatening shadows of the (former) colonizer (Frideres & Reeves, 1993; Mazrui, 1978; Ngugi, 2000).

Ultimately, (former) colonized groups are compelled to various choices in pursuit of political continuity or economic survival, amongst other genuine reasons. Ironically, in their quest for continuity or survival, (former) colonized cultures find themselves continuously beholden to the (former) colonizer. Indeed, over the years, many a controversial decision has been made by the former colonized via formal education that has strongly bonded the former to the colonizer rather than ensure that each travels independent courses (Mazrui, 1978). Somehow it has never been possible to sever the chord that has come to bind the colonizer and the colonized, ironically, through colonization. However, one would never want to advocate mutually exclusive existence for individual cultures. In any case, formal colonial processes left a legacy of binding effects that inevitably dictate interaction between (former) colonizing and (former) colonized cultures.

Thus whatever chord existing between the (former) colonizer and the (former) colonized cultures might not only have been conceived amidst chaos but appears to

thrive on the perpetuating of such chaotic circumstances. Colonization has enabled certain worldviews to be privileged, hence, the designation of dominant cultures. Practices or aspects belonging to such cultures are generally considered dominant by virtue of the fact that they have woven their ways into metropolitan facets of communicative, educational, economic, political and social transactions (Hirabayashi, 1978); consequently, such dominance transcends cultural, gender or continental boundaries.

As noted already, one instrument that has been strategic in spreading the practices or aspects of dominant cultures is language. Dominant cultures have partly attained their status by virtue of the communicative monopoly that their languages have enjoyed at the expense of other languages for several centuries; thus, whilst some languages have become extinct or are endangered or at best are labelled minor, others enjoy the comfortable status of “first” or “international” language(s) (Blair, 1997; Bonvillain, 1993; Frideres & Reeves, 1993; Gurza, 2000; Quirk & Greenbaum, 1982; Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998). That fact has also come across in this study; the participants collectively and unreservedly agree: “*English overshadows minority languages*”. French or Spanish might be substituted for English since either can, on occasion, be labelled a “second language” (Tulasiewicz & Adams, 1998). Apparently the past acts of colonizing cultures have eaten so deeply into the roots of society that the (post)colonial world exists mainly through a few cultures despite the existence and/or the acknowledgement of numerous others (Ermine, 1995; Perley, 1993).

### **A Suspect Agency**

Considering the impact of formal education in the colonial processes, it comes as

no surprise that scholarly attempts would be made to address complex issues of cultural domination. Just as colonized groups have been complicit in the history of imperialism (Abramova, 1979; Vishwanathan, 1989), attempts to address colonial conflicts have not emanated solely from the oppressed cultures; at crucial points in time, cohorts from the colonizer's group have seen fit to advocate *fair* treatment for the annexed cultures (Clarkson, 1999; Beattie, 1997). Also, considering the complex economic, political and socio-cultural dimensions of colonialism, it is practical that current attempts to address it would equally arise from diverse angles: "over the last decade, postcolonial studies has emerged both as a meeting point and the battle ground for a variety of disciplines and theories" (Gandhi, 1998, p. 3). Hence (post)colonial theory has strong links with other theories, whether such theories seek to address issues of marginalization or not (Boer, 2002; Gandhi, 1998; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000). Understandably, current attempts to address issues of socio-cultural marginalization would be a hybrid activity of various scholarly and non-scholarly undertakings as well as efforts from the camps of the colonizer and the colonized. Postcolonial theory, therefore, is in the dilemma of appearing to belong to the former colonized whilst being patronized largely by "scholars" who belong to the former colonized cultures or have strong connections with the latter (Boer, 2002). In more ways than one, (post)colonialism replicates the old pattern, and like postmodernism, sometimes unwittingly excludes even as it includes the colonized or "other" voices (Boer, 2002; hooks, 1998). It might even be said to simulate, on occasion, Jefferson's ideology of "freedom" for black slaves in America (Jefferson, 1997).

Gandhi (1998) posits a standpoint for postcolonial theory which might illustrate

one way that theory at times excludes by including “other” voices:

[T]here is little doubt that in its current mood postcolonial theory principally addresses the needs of the Western academy. It principally attempts to reform the intellectual and epistemological exclusions of this academy, and enables non-Western critics located in the West to present their cultural inheritance as knowledge. (p. ix)

The definition has paradoxical undertones in that whilst appearing to give voice to the marginalized cultures, it simultaneously excludes those scholars who are located outside the West but who might be making equally worthy contribution to (post)colonial debates. The definition above equally cuts off the non-educated from (post)colonial dialogues. Such exclusion underscores a dilemma for the theory about which Gandhi (1998) opines: “Rarely does [postcolonial theory] engage with the theoretical self-sufficiency of African, Indian, Korean, Chinese knowledge systems or foreground those cultures and historical conversations which circumvent the Western world” (p. x). The irony in Gandhi’s definition becomes evident when it is juxtaposed with Bahri’s (1996) general definition of (post)colonial theory: “[I]t is the study of the interactions between European nations and the societies they colonized in the modern period”, and Simonsen’s (1982) acknowledgement of the impact of African writing after independence. Bahri’s definition bespeaks a concept of sharing rather than excluding. It must be noted, however, that neither Gandhi nor Bahri limits postcolonial theory to a definition in their writings. As often happens with concepts, postcolonial theory hardly ever succumbs to a single scholarly definition in any one work. Yet the definitions above are of interest because, again, when juxtaposed, the ironic position of the theory is not lost on the

reader. (Post)colonial theory is sometimes contradictory and a suspect marginalizing agency.

The dubious position of (post)colonial theory within colonial debates is comparable with the attitudes of certain young adults from former colonized cultures. For some young people, contact with dominant cultures renders appreciation for their indigenous minor languages and cultures an elusive task. Rather than strive for balanced handling of both cultures, some young ones, in the attempt to be accepted by mainstream society, totally invest in dominant cultures, thus foregoing the opportunity to explore the world through their indigenous cultures. One young adult offers a reason for such an attitude: *I found my Cree culture weird and different because I grew up in the city. I used to have friends who also felt like that. People that I used to hang out with just didn't care and didn't want to learn and didn't want to ask.* This young adult's response reveals the negative influence an over exposure to a different culture can have on a person; prevailing ideology also plays a vital role.

That point is well illustrated by Olaudah Equiano. The man who sets out to defend degraded Africans during the European Enlightenment era in the end shares the current ideology that Africans need to be civilized by "advanced" Europeans: "[W]hat advantages do not a refined people possess over those who are rude and uncultured? Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even barbarous" (Equiano, 1988, p. 14). Equiano can also be quoted in examining the ironic role of education for the former colonized.

A Western education has equally contributed to alienating some from their indigenous oral cultures and languages. An African young adult currently studying in a

Canadian university comments on the role of English in his life: *In the university the majority of the people speak English, so everything I do is through English language. Well, since they started us with English right from infancy I don't think I find it a big deal.* This comment also stresses the communicative link that has bonded the (former) colonizer and the (former) colonized; the young adults above grew up in Africa. The infancy period he refers to is also the time after his country gained independence from Britain. If (former) colonized people are subjected to the colonizer's language at such an early age, even after independence, it would be easy to grow up imbibing the ideology of the (former) colonizer, and as in the case of the first young adults, find one's indigenous culture "weird". Both language and culture are at play in the scenario being created. However, the story is not an unbroken one of gloom and neglect of oral cultures; some young adults take positive steps to blend dominant and indigenous minor cultures (Bown, 1973).

### **Balanced Perspectives**

There are strong reasons for the participants of this study to blend dominant and indigenous cultures; the young adults interviewed acknowledge the need for individual identity within a multicultural Canada. Their indigenous cultures endow them with a defining sense of identity within mainstream society. The participants also recognize that indigenous language is inextricably linked with indigenous culture, and language perpetuates culture. In connection with that the young adults readily admit that each culture possesses inherently good and poor traits, a necessary reminder that can forestall putting any one culture on a pedestal. Coming from colonial settings, the participants are very much aware of the consequences of mishandling socio-cultural differences as well

as the complicit stand they are in constant danger of assuming. Such complicity as well as the apathy described by the Cree young adults above often tends to imply re-negotiating the silencing of dominant cultures in a (post)colonial world (Said & Barsamian, 1994). Therefore, if people who belong to (former) colonized cultures slight the indigenous languages and cultures in deference to dominant cultures and languages, they re-invent imperialism and render colonization an endless cycle. Such people become the (post)colonial agents who extend the margins lines of minority cultures, thus progressively trivializing any possible “centering” of the former.

The responses of the young adults are crucial to (post)colonial studies and as such are indicators of the need for that theory to engage a wider circle of apostles for its agenda. Rather than limit--unwittingly--its scope to the academics (Boer, 2002), the benefits might be incalculable and diversified by a more communal approach (Slattery, 1995).

It can be argued that this study implicates itself by selectively drawing information from post-secondary participants; in other words, the study might be seen as reinforcing the hierarchies within (post)colonial studies. It was to rectify that situation that the study sought the wisdom of some elders, not all of whom possess strong backgrounds in Western education. The elders were approached to explore possible links between the formal and the informal, the old and the new, the oral as well as the written (Madu, 1992; Phillips, 1974). Similarly, hooks(1998) can locate the non-scholarly within theory: “Since I have not broken the ties that bind me to underclass poor black community, I have seen that knowledge, especially that which enhances daily life and strengthens our capacity to survive, can be shared” (p.135). A collective engagement of

knowledge to address colonial conflicts might accelerate the pace of the process of raising the socio-cultural barriers between the (former) colonizer and the (former) colonized.

No one work can enumerate the right steps needed to address the consequences of formal colonialism; neither can any one group of people or society prescribe, as authentic or otherwise, particular avenues of redress. The delicate nature of colonial processes calls for equally complex and diversified approaches to combat the negative aftermath of cultural annexation, an on-going process, which carries its own troubled implications (Boer, 2002). Rectifying approaches might be initiated by the former colonized themselves, or they might come as a reconciliatory gesture from the camp of the colonizer (Clarkson, 1999; Ngugi, 2000; Said, 1994). Individuals from the (former) colonized cultures may strive for some semblance of their pre-colonial indigenous cultures; others may desire to recapture relevant segments of the past through the present, yet others may advocate equal projection of both colonized and colonizing cultures. The final decision rests with individuals and/or working groups--cultures.

Yet, according to a Cree participant who has been heavily influenced by Western culture, one fact that helps is acquaintanceship with both dominant and minority cultures: *I've been on both sides of the fence. I think every culture should be learned from and studied and kept alive. If there is going to be a blending of cultures, as it has been happening in Canada, that is ok too, as long as all cultures agree on issues and don't start putting down other people's cultures. Yes, I think every single culture should be equally valued.* The researcher, who has been equally exposed to both dominant and her minority indigenous cultures, strongly upholds the sentiment of equally valuing and

dignifying all cultures, which also happens to be the focus of this study.

### **The Challenge**

The challenge then is creating an enabling environment for individual and collective respect for both the dominant and minority cultures. The study has explored participants' knowledge of their minority--colonized--language vis-à-vis dominant languages and cultures. Interviewing young adults from Canadian universities has been especially appropriate in view of Canada's strong multicultural environment (Hirabayashi, 1978). Despite the progress Canada has made in accommodating diverse ethnic cultures, relationships between European settlers and Aboriginal people on one hand, interaction among various ethnic groups on the other, as well as various political decisions diversely affecting different groups on Canadian land, indicate that more needs to be done to achieve genuine socio-cultural harmony in Canada (Bonvillain, 1993; Hirabayashi, 1978). One Cree participant therefore sums the situation up thus: *I guess even though in Canada we're very aware of diversity and we're accepting of diversity we don't fully accept differences. I guess we're not dealing with diversity in the best way that we should.* No one group can be held responsible for the situation the young adults above describe. All the groups inhabiting Canadian land can be held responsible for the Canadian initiative to accommodate diversity, just as each has a role to play in fully embracing ethnic differences.

Commenting on the (post)colonial implications of Canadian diversity for Aboriginal people, the same young adult concludes: *We're still living in the colonial period; I think we're just at the beginning of moving out of the colonial period.* This statement is reflective of the ambivalence surrounding the location of postcolonial

theory. Theorists are yet to agree whether the theory is indicative of a distinct period after formal colonialism or an exercise pertaining to a continuum of current events self-reflective of formal colonial days, hence, theorists' concurrent usage of "Post-Colonial" and "Postcolonial" (Bahri,1998; Shohat, 2000). Also, (post)colonial theory has its limitation on diverse levels; at different stages, it marginalizes women, children, cultures and scholars. The list is not exhaustive. It is neither the aim of this study to argue for a particular period nor support any one group within the (post)colonial concept. The objective of this study is to reinforce genuine respect for all cultures, age and gender included. Nevertheless, for the participants, and perhaps for their language communities as well, learning to speak indigenous languages in order to fully identify with such cultures, constitutes a step in authenticating their cultures. Therefore, becoming intimately acquainted with (former) colonized cultures enables one to appreciate that such cultures are as capable of teaching about the world as are the dominant cultures, and when equally weighed, dominant and minority cultures and their subsequent languages all constitute diverse authentic world views. That acknowledgement constitutes a step from the colonial shadows into a somewhat post-colonial light.

## Oh These Tongues Mine!

I bring in Marlene Nourbese Philip's discourse on language because she captures very well the language dilemma facing the (former) colonized. The poem also has educational and socio-cultural implications for post-colonial criticism

English  
is my mother tongue.  
A mother tongue is not  
not a foreign lan lan lang  
language  
I/anguish  
anguish  
--a foreign anguish...

English is  
my father tongue.  
A father tongue is  
a foreign language,  
therefore English is  
a foreign language  
not a mother tongue.

What is my mother father tongue  
Tongue  
my mammy tongue  
my mummy tongue  
my momsy tongue  
my modder tongue  
my ma tongue?

I have no mother  
tongue  
no mother to tongue  
no tongue to mother  
to mother  
tongue  
me

I must therefore be tongue  
dumb  
dumb -- tongued  
dub -- tongued  
damn dumb  
tongue  
but I have  
a dumb tongue  
tongue dumb  
father tongue  
and english is  
my mother tongue  
is  
my father tongue  
is a foreign lan lan lang  
language  
I/anguish

(From Discourse, 2002)

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **Research Questions Revisited**

This study rose out of a long-held desire of the researcher to understand her contemporaries' apparent indifference towards the native oral or minority language at home in Ghana. In seeking some explanation to what, in all probability, constitutes a great challenge for her contemporaries in balancing appreciation for minority and dominant languages and cultures the researcher (I) also sought to clear her own (mis)conceptions regarding the relationship between her indigenous language and secondary language and describe how each has impacted on her socio-cultural identity, within and outside her ethnic settings. Growing up in an environment in which older persons predominantly had the privilege of critiquing and criticising the younger generations' tendency to distance themselves from and make a mess of the oral, minority cultures, the researcher also looked on this study as a voice for the young adults.

Having been born in the post-independence period during the history of my country, I am one of numerous children from the former-colonized groups whose knowledge of their indigenous cultures constitutes aspects of the cultures as they have survived formal colonization (Miller, 1990). Similarly, none of the young adults who were interviewed for the study has any experience of the pre-colonial nature of their native cultures. Not even the elders, whose views were sought for the insight they could provide for better knowledge of language, could boast of pre-colonial knowledge of the respective cultures they discussed

in the dialogue sessions, both having been born after contact with the colonizers. What is more, the participants currently live within dominant societies. Inevitably, the opinions they express relate to the oral indigenous cultures and languages, as they remain after contact with Western cultures and as they are impacted on by everyday dealings with dominant cultures and languages.

The African young adult participants are all currently studying in a Canadian university; the Cree participants are either studying at the university or engaged in some type of post-secondary education. Backgrounded by their everyday intimacy with the dominant cultures, the participants discuss what they know about their native cultures. Interestingly, participants express appreciable knowledge about their cultures and the place of language in such cultures, the main research question to which the study sought answers. All participants unreservedly accept that culture is a way of life and plays a huge role in a person's life. They insist that they are knowledgeable about their cultures in spite of doing things mostly in the dominant ways. The participants look upon their native cultures as heritage. Their cultural heritage defines and differentiates them from other people and other cultures. As such, the native cultures should be cherished. Because the participants have distinct heritage by way of their cultures, they can lay claim to a distinct sense of identity. The participants also admit that people from other cultures are also endowed with various identities through their own cultures; subsequently, the differences that people from different societies exhibit might, to a large extent, be presumed cultural differences.

Sojourning in a Western world has not alienated the participants from their indigenous cultures. They understand themselves as Africans and Aboriginals. It is not so much the participants knowing that they have a culture as it is in their acknowledging that

they belong to a different worldview from the dominant society of which they are currently part. In that acknowledgement lies a certain amount of loyalty to the native cultures, which is neither easily perceived nor explained, due to participants living so much of their lives through the dominant ways. Coming from young people who have had to go through much of their life doing things in the dominant ways, acknowledging their minority cultures in such an implicit manner offers food for serious thought. It underscores a certain amount of stability for the minority cultures. If cultures must be lived in order to be kept alive, so long as sons and daughters cherish and practise their native ways, as the young adult participants do their respective cultures, the survival of the minority oral cultures is somewhat ensured.

The participants look upon social-cultural practices as constituting a way of life, which practices keep different cultures alive. These practices include behavioural patterns that are taught to young people in various cultures. The participants have managed to hold on to the things their (grand)parents taught them. The implications are that as young ones try to practise their native ways, even if occasionally, such practices render oral minority cultures visible, hence, perpetuates such cultures, regardless of the extent to which they have been previously marginalized. The participants emphasise that their knowledge of their native cultures comprises the things they have been taught at home and by their native community. The point they make underscores the need for parents to teach their children the ways of their cultures. The obstacle is that due to past colonial acts, (grand)parents do not possess equal knowledge of their native cultures; therefore adults' knowledge of their native cultures varies greatly (Frideres & Reeves, 1993). All the participants have acquired enough knowledge of their native cultures to affirm that their true identities originate with the African and Aboriginal cultures, specifically Asante, Kalenjin and Cree. Thus,

individually and collectively, the young adults identify the 'self' not with the dominant cultures that occupy a large place in their day-to-day activities, but rather with the native cultures, which would ordinarily appear to take second place in their lives.

The relevance that participants for this study attach to their indigenous cultures extends to their native languages, their inability to speak with the desired fluency, as variously required by their respective language communities notwithstanding. Formal education, an upshot of colonization, has progressively enabled dominant languages to enjoy a monopoly in major areas of communication. The relevance of stable economic conditions as a prerequisite for social success and the desire for maneuverability within international communities increases the practicality of adopting dominant languages, or at least, learning to utilize them beyond the average speaker's level. Another factor militating against the common use of minority languages is that communication in key areas of life such as entertainment, politics and education is generally done through one dominant language or another; that is the reality in both minority and dominant societies. Hence, whether they remain within their indigenous cultural environment or not, the participants have great need to learn a dominant language, in this situation, the English language. Thus these young adults and others like them are faced with numerous difficulties in their attempts to (re)claim their language. The difficulties listed above, and numerous others, diversely impact on the day-to-day choices the young adults make between the native and the dominant language.

Yet, undaunted, the participants are making efforts to master the mother tongue, often against huge socio-economic odds, for the crucial reason that the mother tongue enforces the distinct identity endowed on them by their native oral cultures. They desire to

keep their cultures alive in order to maintain their socio-cultural identities. The best possible avenue through which to achieve such objectives is by (re)claiming their native languages, the rationale being that native languages provide an avenue to native cultures. Participants collectively admit that a culture cannot remain alive if its language is no longer spoken. The young adults admit though that there are other ways of knowing one's culture besides speaking the mother tongue well, yet, they strongly believe that without a full grasp of the native language, one misses important aspects of the culture.

Eben uses his experience at Cree sweatlodge ceremonies to explain the strong connection between the Cree language and the Cree culture. He cannot communicate effectively in Cree. He sits through the sweatlodge ceremony, one important Cree rite, but without fully grasping its significance. Since the sweatlodge is such an integral part of the Cree culture, Eben is convinced that what he misses at sweat ceremonies constitutes a missing link that would easily be supplied if he had a good grasp of the Cree language. He does not explain how he arrives at his conclusion, yet he believes that he misses something important when his father explains Cree ceremonies in English. His inability to grasp the full meaning in Cree makes him feel that he is missing the "piece" that completes the puzzle. He insists that the "piece" can only be supplied through the Cree language, which he does not speak very well at this point. Eunice also believes that it is possible to learn about the culture before learning the mother tongue, yet she is convinced that such a person would not attain a thorough understanding of the culture.

Thus individually and collectively, these young adults make the mother tongue an integral part of respective cultures without which one's understanding of a culture cannot be said to be complete. By implication, if a native could not speak the mother tongue very

well, that native would not attain complete understanding of his or her culture, which might in turn impact the manner in which such a native would transmit the culture to younger generations. If one fully understands the culture, one can transmit aspects of the culture to young people in appreciable degrees. However, if a native has a partial understanding of culture, that native can only explain the culture partially. What cultural knowledge is considered “full” or “partial” varies from generation to generation.

However, Rachel believes that mother tongue does more than keep a culture alive; it is also a birthright. As such, everyone ought to have claim to a mother tongue. Furthermore, when she juxtaposes her minority mother tongue, Kalenjin and her second language, the dominant English, she realizes that she is more comfortable with Kalenjin, because it is not such a public language. It is easy to claim the Kalenjin language as her own because she has to share it with a few others, as compared with the numerous speakers of the world who lay claim to the English language. She can experience a sense of seclusion with her native language that she cannot manage with English, due to the open nature of the latter.

Rachel portrays her mother tongue as a cultural bulwark impossible to be penetrated by the colonizer. Formal education has enabled her to invade the language space of the colonizer, mainly because colonization imposed the colonizers’ languages on the colonized, by which same process the colonizers’ languages have become dominant. But as a former colonized woman, Rachel can always escape to her minority language space. It is the one place from which she can shut out the former colonizer. She is especially appreciative of her ability to communicate with her immediate family back home in the mother tongue. Regardless of her location in Canada, Rachel communicates with the family in Africa on

the phone with the utmost sense of privacy, because she is aware that most people in Canada cannot speak her minority native language. It is an enclosed space to which only she and other speakers of the language have a legitimate access. Thus, whether at home in Kenya or abroad, Rachel's mother tongue serves to distinguish her from the colonizer with whom she shares the English language. It also deflects the threat of an overwhelming feeling of nonentity that might otherwise engulf her in the dominant Canadian society of which she is currently part.

Similarly for Kwaku Panin, mother tongue offers an escape from the loneliness and sense of loss that sometimes results from living in a dominant society. He explains that he experiences a feeling of elation upon encountering a fellow Ghanaian in Canada with whom he can speak his native language. Then reverting to the mother tongue becomes a mere spontaneous reaction. Being a black person in a predominantly white community, he sometimes gets disoriented from the isolation that results from being a visible minority person at this university, and also from speaking someone else's language all the time. He therefore cannot resist showing his affiliation with a fellow Ghanaian with whom he can speak his native language when he meets one.

The sense of disorientation that comes upon one in a foreign land is an experience that I fully appreciate. Speaking someone else's language all the time becomes depressing, even stifling. Psychologically, it heightens the foreigner's sense of isolation in the new environment; it effectively places the new speaker outside the dominant ethnic community, especially when native speakers constantly comment on the foreigner's second language skills, though without malice. However, being a student with a hectic schedule often means that one does not have much time to brood. Speaking English is automatic, because

everyone understands it. The ability to speak English well enhances communication for non-native English speakers studying at this university. Therefore the feeling of “disorientation” that Kwaku Panin describes is not an everyday occurrence. In fact, such “feelings of loss” often descend on one without warning, usually when one is overly weighed down by events. Inevitably, such bouts of “disorientation” are accompanied by deep nostalgia. It is not surprising then that Kwaku Panin takes refuge in his mother tongue upon seeing a native acquaintance. I consider my native language a haven during difficult moments. On such occasions, the mother tongue symbolizes all that one is forced to make second place in one’s day-to-day dealings: the practices, beliefs, cherished ethics that distinguish a person from the new culture within which one sojourns.

Ironically, the sense of isolation that results from speaking another’s language simultaneously reminds the foreigner, very forcefully, of his or her own ethnic community, located elsewhere, a distant place s/he considers home. That might explain the nostalgia that engulfs one during such moments. Therefore, the feeling of “disorientation” is a simultaneous trigger and an antidote to nostalgia. In speaking the native minority language within the dominant society, therefore, the speaker is reminded and/or convinced of his/her own language, which represents an equally legitimate culture or worldview as the dominant one. All the participants affirm that both minority and dominant languages perform equivalent legitimate roles of expressing their respective authentic cultures, among other serious functions.

Paradoxically, the ability to communicate well in the dominant language strongly allies the participants with the dominant culture. That alliance eventually culminates in hierarchies within both minority and dominant language communities (Lee, 1992). Within

the minority cultures, oral speakers who are fluent speakers of a dominant language tend to be placed higher, socially, than their contemporaries who might have poor or mediocre command over the dominant language. Good language skills are usually achieved through formal education; education raises social status. It can be deduced from the experiences of the participants that very often, much exposure to a dominant language presupposes a drift from the mother tongue. That drift also signifies a barrier that gradually gets erected between the highly educated and the less educated, which also translates to better and poorer users, respectively, of the dominant (formal) language. Thus within the native community there are different phases of communicative isolation for the highly educated. From my woman's perspective, the level of isolation could further be heightened by one's gender. Eunice grew up in the city and could not speak Cree when she moved back onto a reserve during her teenage years. She observes that such language differences segment society. There are the traditionalists who are able users of the language and feel very strongly about the culture. Outside of that group are the ones who know a bit of the language but are not as passionate about the culture as those in the first group.

Other participants variously develop the theme of division or isolation created by communicative barriers. Rachel simply refuses to entertain the idea of speaking English in her village in Kenya. She refers to the traditional homes in the villages as farms, because the villagers are predominantly farmers. City dwellers usually go to the farms during holidays. Rachel would not speak English at the farms where cultural or traditional activities often occur, and which she also considers her roots. What is more, her grandparents live there. It would be disrespectful to speak English to her grandparents who cannot speak the language at all; also most of the farm hands are illiterates and can only

manage either Swahili or Kalenjin. She feels that speaking English at the farms would be like importing an unwanted culture onto the farms. If she did that upon going home, it would appear as if she were projecting Canadian beliefs as the way of things. She uses language to represent culture.

Rachel cannot reconcile the profound Kalenjin cultural environments of the farms with the colonizer's language. She considers such occasions as opportune moments for the younger generation, living most of their lives in the cities, who are overly exposed to dominant languages and practices through formal education, to be educated in native Kalenjin ways. Family gatherings on the farms are occasions when such young ones can bridge the communicative and cultural barriers between themselves and the older generation. Of utmost importance is the fact that the gatherings educate young ones, thus ensuring the preservation of the culture. As such, reverting to the English language would invalidate the significance of the gatherings at the farms. If English became the medium of expression at the farms during such family gatherings, the farms would simply become annexes of the cities. That would effectively obliterate the cultural recovery objectives of such grand occasions.

Kwaku Panin intends to keep his native language, because he does not want to disappoint his family and community when he eventually returns home, simply because he would not be able to meet them on equal native communicative levels. Also he does not want to give folks at home the impression, upon returning home, that he has become so assimilated into the Canadian culture as to forget his roots. He would not speak with his grandmother in English; she might not understand the language. Besides, even if she did, she would prefer communicating in her own language. The essence of the cultural training

he was given in his childhood was to help him maintain his language and culture. Hence, if Kwaku Panin returned home and could only communicate in the foreign language to his elders, they would conclude that all their efforts at training him had been in vain.

Kwaku probably has witnessed the derision heaped on native Ghanaians who return home from abroad and struggle to communicate with other natives in the mother tongue. Such ones are often unable to accomplish simple utterances without resorting to a second language, usually, the medium of communication of their foreign country of residence. Living in Canada for three years has taught me that such communicative difficulty does not necessarily imply a slight of the native language. One gets used to a spoken medium; with time foreigners become comfortable with their second or third languages, especially if they have to use them all the time, as all the participants can attest to. Therefore, if one suddenly finds oneself changing tongues upon returning home, one cannot switch without frequently relapsing into the adopted tongue. People's ability to retain or lose the native language skills after moving abroad differs from one person to another.

The African participants might inform how quickly or otherwise a person might lose his or her native language upon moving away from home. Kwaku Ketewa, who has barely had exposure to his native language, mainly due to the type of schools he attended, and who could neither speak nor write his native language very well before he left his country, is likely to lose it at a quicker rate than Kwaku Panin, who has had a very good exposure throughout his life. The latter reads and writes his native language very well and is confident that he will pick up Canadian ways yet will always retain his language and native ways. Kwaku Ketewa is not so confident in spite of efforts to maintain the little of his native ways that he has managed to grasp over the years. The native language skills of

the two can fairly be determined only against their social and academic backgrounds. However, hard-core traditionalists might fail to consider such details. They may merely presume a traveller's willingness to be assimilated into a new culture and the resultant desire to ignore native ways. Such a person might unfairly take on the native community's disdain, especially if clumped with some native people who return from abroad and judge native ways by the standards of Western cultures.

The reality, though, is that a person does not have to travel to disrespect the native culture. There are people from the former colonized societies who are yet to travel, but who place more value on dominant cultures than the native ones, primarily because they see and read from the television and foreign printed materials. Many at home are also misinformed by travelers. Native communities at home therefore need to differentiate between those who do not want to (re)claim native ways and others who have the desire but are hindered by social, academic and economic factors in their desire to retain certain native ways.

These young adults acknowledge that escaping the shackles of colonialism is an act that can be effectively undertaken only by the former colonized themselves. The former colonizers may not boast of the past colonizing deeds, yet the complex nature of colonization renders it impossible for all cultures to gain equal recognition. Cultures will continue to be looked upon as dominant and minority. Social stereotypes or adherents of fixed ideologies give dominant cultures a decisive lead over minority ones in the areas of communication, education, politics and economics; the list is by no means exhaustive. It is not to be expected that the whole world will reach a consensus on the legitimacy of the former marginalized cultures, even if formal colonialism has ended. People from former colonized cultures owe it to themselves to legitimise their minority worldviews. The

participants agree that they must learn to value their native languages and through the languages preserve the oral cultures. Preserving the oral cultures will ensure the co-existence of both dominant and minority cultures. That will prove the resilience of the minority cultures. Colonialism could not wipe out the oral cultures. Yet the colonial processes heavily overshadowed the latter. The real task is escaping from the clutches of colonialism whilst acknowledging that the hitherto colonized cultures are as authentic as the colonizing ones. In other words, if people from minor cultures continue to invest solely in the dominant ways, they hinder the progress of the former colonized cultures. They extend the dark days of colonialism. The vindication of the former colonized cultures might be more meaningful if the former colonized live their cultures and value their native languages.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup>It was basically the Basel missionary practice to learn a native language--Twi--in Ghana. This was thought to be the easiest means of converting the "heathens" to Christianity. On the contrary, the missionaries who worked with the Canadian natives helped to suppress the native language. It was a highly punishable offence to speak native languages in residential schools in Canada.

<sup>2</sup>English is the official language in Ghana.

<sup>3</sup> Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957, Kenya in 1963.

<sup>4</sup> First edition of the autobiography entitled *The Interesting Narrative Of The Life Of Olaudah Equiano* was published in 1784.

<sup>5</sup> In postcolonial studies, hybridism is associated primarily with writings by Homi Bhabha. See Bhabha, H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

<sup>6</sup> Documenting aspects of the oral tradition brings its associated problems. Very often oral sayings need to be translated into a dominant medium before they may be documented, probably because more often than not the agents who document materials either belong to the dominant cultures or have been educated in the dominant ways. Translated thoughts might not carry the same meaning and thought processes they originally carry in their oral contexts; however, it could be strongly argued that translated (adulterated) versions of oral thoughts, retrievable by future generations, are a far better alternative to *pure* but extinct ones.

<sup>7</sup> The system has since changed. Now, after primary six students attend junior secondary school for three years, and then depending on their performance in the final examination, they move on to senior secondary school for another three years.

<sup>8</sup> Only the written native languages are taught in schools. Each region selects the language that is native to the area and/or spoken by the majority of the population. Sometimes a school makes arrangement to teach a language that might not necessarily be the medium of its location if there are enough students willing to study the said language as an elective.

<sup>9</sup> The Asantes' inheritance system is matrilineal.

<sup>10</sup> See Jeremiah 31:29-30. Referring to Israel's exile in Babylon the God of Israel denounces children having to pay for their father's sins and promises justice in the time ahead when only perpetrators will bear the consequences of their acts.

<sup>11</sup> It is not being implied that formal education was a sequel to formal colonialism; in certain contexts the two might easily be labelled concurrent concepts.

<sup>12</sup> See also *Thoughts And Sentiments On The Evils Of Slavery* by Quobna Ottobah Cuguano, another black slave writer on the subject of the transAtlantic slave trade.

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## **APPENDIX A:**

Ethics Approval/ Letters Of Consent

Application for Approval of Research Protocol  
University of Saskatchewan Ethics Committee

Research supervisor: Dr. Trevor Gambell. Department of Curriculum Studies

1a. Name of student: Dinah S. Amankwah (181860)

Proposed thesis as required for Master's Degree in Department of Curriculum Studies.

1b. I am hoping to start research by the ending of March 2001 and finish by Spring 2001.

2. Title of Study: Young Adults, Oral Languages and Cultures: Postcolonial Perspectives.

3. Abstract: The study will explore the dilemma facing former colonized subjects in speaking their native--minor--languages. The study will trace the historical clash between European and native--African and Aboriginal--cultures, and the condescending attitudes Europeans adopted towards non-European cultures, which eventually led to the colonization of such cultures. The study will dwell on the effects of colonization on African and Aboriginal languages, Twi and Cree, respectively. Colonization has succeeded in dichotomizing the world's cultures into two categories: dominant and minor cultures. The dichotomy spilled over into languages used by the cultures; consequently, the world speaks dominant and minor languages. Just as major cultures have the edge over minor ones, dominant languages continue to overshadow minor ones. The result has been the conclusion by some individuals that dominant languages constitute more importance than minor ones, mainly because the former dominate in major areas of communication--education, economics, technology, politics, entertainment. A cross-section of the young adults who belong to minor cultures subscribe to this view. Such young adults barely make efforts to know their native cultures and languages; they glow in their cultural inadequacies while investing so much of themselves in dominant ones. The fact that the young adults in question possess mainly colloquial skills in native languages does not seem to be of concern them. Such negligence could have dire consequences for native languages. Most importantly, such attitudes enforce marginalization of minor languages thus perpetuating colonial tendencies. The young adults from (former) colonized cultures who slight their native cultures and languages render themselves unwitting agents for post-colonialism.

In a postmodern era where the focus is on multiple ways of learning, it is interesting that such young adults do not explore their cultures in order to ascertain their validity as sources of knowledge, nor how such cultures may contribute to building society. The study will attempt to find the reasons behind such attitudes. It will also explore some of the differences that exist among dominant and minor languages--English versus Twi and Cree--in order to ascertain what unity can be inferred from such differences rather than make differences create animosity among cultures and people.

4. Funding: Researcher is doing the research without external funding.

5. Subjects: Interview participants will be chosen from the international and Aboriginal student population. The researcher will talk to various students from both groups and solicit the agreement of qualified ones to serve as participants for the study. Both sets of participants should fall within the age group of 20-35. The Aboriginal participants should be native Cree speakers; of the two Africans one should be a West African—Ghanaian--while the other could be either East or South African. Elders from the Twi and Cree communities will be selected through contacts who have access to the communities. Participants will retain ownership of any and all data that will be collected. Information collected will not be used in any way the participants may object to. The privacy of participants will be respected at all times during the research.

6. Each participant will receive two consent forms. (See attached Letter). Each participant will be required to sign both forms to signify their consent to participate in the study. Participants will keep one consent form while the researcher keeps the other.

7. Methods/Procedure: The research method being proposed is the qualitative type. The study will combine the colonial experiences of the researcher and those of other African and Aboriginal students. The researcher's participation will take the form of her native language learning experience and its effect on her sense of identity within a dominant culture. This will pave the way for the use of individual stories and life experiences as key elements in the final interpretative analysis. Dialogue sessions with elders might allow insight into the aesthetics of oral languages. Interview sessions on a one-on-one basis might yield information about the decisions young people from minor (oral) cultures have to make in a world that advantage dominant cultures. Transcripts will be made in English; any interpretation derived from them will be discussed with participants.

8. Storage of Data: Recorded tapes, transcripts, and field notes will be given to the research supervisor for safekeeping. All data will be saved for five years upon completion of the study, and then they will be destroyed.

9. Dissemination of Results: I will analyze and interpret the data; the interpretation will form part of my thesis.

10. Risk or Deception: None.

11. Confidentiality: Participants' identity will be safeguarded, unless individuals desire otherwise. Only pseudonyms will be used in the final analysis. This is intended to protect the identity of participants.

12. Data/Transcript Release: Participants will be given the opportunity to review the final transcripts. They will have the right to withdraw any or all of their responses. They will have to approve the interpretations that will be derived from their responses before they can be used for the thesis. Upon participants' approval of the final transcripts, they will be requested to sign transcript release forms that will

acknowledge that the transcripts accurately reflect what they said or intended to say.  
(See attached transcript release form).

13. Feedback and debriefing: At the end of the research, each participant will be given a debriefing form. Participants will have access to the final report, if they so desire.  
(See attached debriefing form).

14. Signatures

Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Department Head: \_\_\_\_\_

## Participant Consent Form--Students

**Title:** People of Oral societies' Understanding of Language and Culture: Postcolonial Perspectives.

**Name of researcher:** Dinah S. Amankwah.

**Institution:** Department of Curriculum Studies, College of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Saskatchewan.

Telephone: (306) 374-3002 -home

Dear Participant:

I am conducting the above-named study for my Master's Thesis. The study aims to promote interest in minor and oral languages; it also proposes to present such languages as authentic ways of knowing contrary to worldviews that have marginalized them. The study focuses on young adults from (former) colonized cultures, with reference to the Cree, Asante Twi and Kalenjin language communities, who have grown up amidst dominant cultures, and who are finding it challenging to show equal appreciation for dominant and minor cultures. I am soliciting your voluntary participation in this study. Your participation will allow you to share your rich knowledge with others. It might help to heighten young adults' appreciation for oral cultures; this could help them to know or reinforce their identities. I hope to present my findings at educational and language conferences; I also hope to be able to publish aspects of the findings in scholarly journals and other publications. I will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Your participation will consist of two or three interview sessions on a one-on-one basis. I will tape-record your responses. The interview questions are designed to generate your thoughts on language and culture and the roles they play in your social and cultural identity. The questions are not designed for limited nor specific responses; rather they are meant to prompt open responses that could objectively apply to your culture as well as other cultures. I hope to conduct all the interviews between the months of April and May.
2. Between sessions and during interview analysis, I may be calling on you to clarify any responses that I might find difficult to understand. It will be my responsibility to record and transcribe interviews and also code various responses you relay to me. After every interview session you will be given the opportunity to review the transcription in order to verify that they accurately reflect your responses. After you have verified that the transcription reflects your responses we will move on to the next session. At the end of my analysis you will review the interpretation I make of your responses to ascertain that they accurately represent your opinions before I publish my report; you will have the right to delete, add or alter any aspect of your contribution. Throughout the interview you have the right to refuse to answer any question that you might deem too personal.
3. Your true identity will be protected at all times, unless you otherwise desire. Only

pseudonyms will be used in the final interpretative analysis of the study. Your identity and responses will be treated as confidential.

4. In accordance with the University of Saskatchewan Guidelines on Behavioural Ethics, tape recordings, field notes and transcriptions for the study will be given to my supervisor for safekeeping. Upon completion of the study, data will be stored in my supervisor's office here at the university for five years, and then they will be destroyed.

5. Your participation remains voluntary throughout the study. You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time up to the point at which the final document has been prepared. Your withdrawal will neither affect your academic status nor access to or continuation of services provided by public agencies such as the university, social services and hospitals. If you should withdraw your participation in the middle of the study, your data will be deleted from the study and destroyed.

I may choose not to use your data if you do not go through all the interview questions with me.

There are no risks involved in the study; however, should certain sensitive issues arise in the course of the interviews, any such questions that might have brought up such issues would be promptly withdrawn. The study seeks your individual opinion on language and culture. As required by section six of the document *Research Involving Aboriginal Peoples*, the legitimate issue ... is determining whether individuals have the right to speak in their own rights as individual without seeking permission from authority...when the approval of the community [is] required". The study neither involves issues of property nor requires participants to offer information pertaining to the groups to which they belong. Throughout the interview and dialogue sessions the researcher will emphasize that opinions expressed belong to the individuals and do not reflect the thoughts of the larger community from which participants come.

The researcher has contacted an elder from the Beardy's reserve who also teaches Cree in the reserve's elementary school. Since this elder is also a fluent English speaker, he has offered to bring in other elders to talk to the researcher. The elder has been told that the purpose of the study is to get young adults from oral cultures' perspectives on oral languages and culture and that the study also hopes to raise awareness, especially, among the young adults as to the need to cultivate equal respect for all languages and cultures. If the issue of language differences arises, the latter will be respectfully called upon to perform the role of a translator between researcher and the other elders. The researcher has also located an elder from the Twi community. This elder is a literate grandparent who speaks English fairly fluently. The researcher belongs to the latter's tribe so both can communicate in the native language. The dialogues will be conducted in the native language. It will be the researcher's responsibility to translate conversations into English. The elders will be given the opportunity to go through the translation in order to ensure that the translation reflects her thoughts. The elder from the Twi community has been given the same reasons for the study that the elder from the Beardy's reserve has been given. Elders' participation in the study will consist mainly of explaining the role of proverbs in their respective

languages. They have the same rights as the other participants (See Participant's Consent Form--Elders).

As a research participant in this study you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-4053) any time you have questions about this study. Copies of the finished thesis will be made available to the public through the library and the department of Curriculum Studies. Through either outlet, you will always have access to my research. You may also contact my supervisor:

Professor Trevor Gambell

Department of Curriculum Studies

Telephone: (306) 966-7654

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the guidelines above and agree to participate in the study. I understand the procedures that Dinah Amankwah has explained. A copy of this letter has been given to me for my records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Participant Consent Form--Elders**

Title: People of Oral societies' Understanding of Language and Culture: Postcolonial Perspectives

Name of researcher: Dinah S. Amankwah

Institution: Department of Curriculum Studies, College of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Saskatchewan.

Telephone: (306) 374-3002

Dear Participant:

I am conducting the above-named study for my Master's Thesis. The study aims to promote interest in minor--oral languages; it also purposes to present such languages as authentic ways of knowing contrary to worldviews that have marginalized them. The study focuses on young adults from (former) colonized cultures who have grown up amidst dominant cultures, with reference to the Cree, Asante Twi and Kalenjin language communities, and who are finding it challenging to show equal appreciation for dominant and minor cultures. I am soliciting your voluntary participation in this study. Your participation will allow you to share your rich knowledge with others. It might help to heighten young adults' appreciation for oral cultures and societies; this could help them to know or reinforce their identities. I hope to present my findings at educational and language conferences; I also hope to be able to publish aspects of the findings in scholarly journals and other publications. I will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. Your participation might consist of two to four conversational sessions. I will write down your responses.
2. Between sessions and during dialogue analysis, I may be calling on you to clarify any responses that I might find difficult to understand. It will be my responsibility to code various responses you relay to me. After every dialogue session you will be given the opportunity to review the coding in order to verify that they accurately reflect your responses. After you have verified that the coding reflects your responses we will move on to the next session. At the end of my analysis you will review all the interpretation I make of your responses; you have the right to delete, add or alter any aspect of your contribution. Throughout the dialogue sessions you have the right to refuse to answer any question that you might deem too personal.
3. Your true identity will be protected at all times, unless you otherwise desire. Only pseudonyms will be used in the final interpretative analysis of the study. Your identity and responses will be treated as confidential.

4. In accordance with the University of Saskatchewan Guidelines on Behavioural Ethics, field notes for the study will be given to my supervisor for safekeeping. Upon completion of the study, data will be stored in my supervisor's office here at the university for five years, and then they will be destroyed.

5. Your participation remains voluntary throughout the study. You have the right to withdraw your participation at any time up to the point at which the final document has been prepared. Your withdrawal will neither affect your social status nor access to or continuation of services provided by public agencies such as the university, social services and hospitals. If you should withdraw your participation in the middle of the study, your data will be deleted from the study and burned. If I choose to discontinue working with you, your data will be deleted from the study and destroyed. I may choose not to use your data if you do not go through all the questions with me.

There are no risks involved in the study but if certain sensitive issues should arise in the course of the interviews, any such questions that might have brought up such issues would be promptly withdrawn. The study seeks your individual opinion on language and culture. Consequently any opinions you express are from your individual perspectives and do not necessarily reflect the thoughts of the larger community from which you come.

As a research participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-4053) any time you have questions about this study.

You may also contact my supervisor:

Professor Trevor Gambell  
Department of Curriculum Studies  
Telephone: (306) 966-7654

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the guidelines above and agree to participate in the study. I understand the procedures that Dinah Amankwah has explained. A copy of this letter has been given to me for my records.

If the issue of illiteracy arises, the researcher will seek verbal agreement from elder(s) after a thorough oral explanation of the procedures.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**APPENDIX B**

**Debriefing /Transcript Release Forms**

## **Debriefing form**

Dear Participant:

Thank you very much for participating in the study. I appreciate the time you expended in the study despite your heavy schedule. We have now come to the end of the research. The final report of the study will appear in my thesis, which I plan to complete by Spring 2002. It will be available upon request by contacting the researchers indicated below:

Supervisor: Professor Trevor J. Gambell

Assistant Dean, Student Affairs

College of Education

University of Saskatchewan

Telephone: (306) 966-7654

Email: [gamblelt@duke.usask.ca](mailto:gamblelt@duke.usask.ca)

Researcher: Dinah Amankwah

Telephone: (306) 374-3002; Email:

Email: [dsa479@mail.usask.ca](mailto:dsa479@mail.usask.ca)

Office of Research Services: (306) 966-4053

**Data /Transcript Release Forms**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study and acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Dinah Amankwah. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Dinah Amankwah to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature      Date