VOICES OF FIRST NATIONS WOMEN: THEIR POLITICS AND POLITICAL ORGANIZING IN VANCOUVER, B.C.

by

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B.A., University of California at Berkeley, 1990

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Anthropology and Sociology

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

September 1994

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Date  **9/30/94**
ABSTRACT

As a contribution to the literature on Aboriginal women and politics on the Northwest Coast, this study focuses on the experiences of nine First Nations women who are community leaders in Vancouver, British Columbia. They are involved in political work in various settings: First Nations political organizations on the local, national and international levels, the government, non-governmental agencies, service organizations, tribal councils, and/or community projects.

The research methods used are interviewing, the collection of life histories and collaboration, with a feminist and reflexive approach. Informal, interactive interviews were carried out with these particular First Nations women, and contacts were made with other Aboriginal men and women in the city of Vancouver. A significant part of this thesis are brief life histories that include the individual voices of the nine participants.

These women have moved to Vancouver from reserves or small communities throughout B.C., and most of them have also participated in the political process in these communities. Some are currently active in both regions. Their narratives emphasize the strong ties they have to their families, communities, and nations. I conclude that these particular women's connections to both domains are complex and it is not always easy for them to move back and forth to their homeland.

This research bridges two units of analysis within anthropology: community studies that focus on Aboriginal women and politics on reserves, and urban studies that include the experiences of Aboriginal women in the city. The concerns of these First Nations women span from the urban center to the reserve or small community, although they are residing in Vancouver. They
need to inform both non-Aboriginals and other First Nations people of their links to their communities and to the land.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the participation of the First Nations women who are the focus of this thesis: Fay Blaney, Lillian Howard, Terri Netsena, Gloria Nicolson, Susan Tatoosh, Marge White, Lorna Williams, and two women who remain anonymous. I wish to thank them immensely, not only for their willingness to take time from their busy schedules, but also for enlightening me on matters that concern them as Aboriginal women, and their First Nations communities as a whole. I also wish to thank the other First Nations people I spoke with who offered insights into Aboriginal politics.

I would like to thank my academic advisor, Dr. Bruce Miller, for all his support, guidance, and encouragement not only in carrying out the research and writing up of this M.A. thesis, but throughout graduate school. Dr. Julie Cruikshank has been invaluable as a committee member and as a professor, and I appreciate her interest in my project. Thank you to Dr. Dawn Currie, who offered many good suggestions initially when she was a committee member before the changes were made to the M.A. program. I appreciate the constructive comments from Dr. Millie Creighton, the third reader of this thesis. Thanks to the administrative staff of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at UBC for their assistance during the two years I was in the department.

A special thank you to the many colleagues -- whose names I will not mention, but they know who they are -- in the Department of Anthropology and Sociology who provided encouragement and a friendly atmosphere while I pursued my Master's degree. Many thanks are in order to my family and friends in B.C. and California (and one sister in New Haven) who put up with me during the two years I was moving back and forth between the two communities. I would like to thank Sylvia Vane from Cultural Systems Research, Inc. and Ballena Press for agreeing to my reduced work schedule while I completed the write-up of this thesis.

I am especially grateful to my husband, Michel, who has supported me on many levels in my academic pursuits as an undergraduate and graduate student in the last few years.
In loving memory

of my father,

Sidney K. Cole

(1914-1994)
INTRODUCTION

Cherokee anthropologist Rayna Green claimed that there was a paucity of literature from the Northwest Coast in her 1980 review of academic and popular literature on Native American women in the U.S. and Canada. In the last decade, some significant research has been carried out on the economic and political roles of Aboriginal women from British Columbia and Washington.\(^1\) This literature consists primarily of community studies that focus on the political processes occurring on reserves or in small communities in rural areas. There have been no recent anthropological studies undertaken on Aboriginal women and politics in urban centers in this region -- an important area of inquiry. As a contribution to this literature, this study focuses on the contemporary experiences of nine First Nations\(^2\) women who are, or have been, leaders of First Nations political organizations and/or community programs in the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. They belong to a network of First Nations women who are actively engaged in Aboriginal political, social, economic and educational issues in this urban center on the Northwest Coast.

These particular women have all moved to Vancouver from reserves or small communities on the coast, in the interior and northern regions of British Columbia where most of them also participated, and in some cases are currently active, in the political process. Central to this research is their relationship to their home communities and how they mediate between the city and their homeland. Although these women are working and living in an urban environment, they emphasize how their political organizing extends from the city to the reserve or home community (and in some instances, nationally and internationally). An analysis of their narratives demonstrates that these women are connected to both domains in complex and difficult ways. It is evident that all of them have significant ties to their own communities. Two of the women
express the desire to return to assist in community political, economic and social development; two state that they have been asked to move back to their reserves, and three of the women maintain that they are able to continue to work in both regions. One woman had an extremely difficult experience when she moved back to her reserve after several years absence because, in her view, the community did not want to face its own problems.

I conclude that, for these women, moving back and forth to their home communities is not always easily accomplished. They are viewed as educated urban First Nations women and are sometimes rejected by others who do not live in the city. The women's words suggest that they need to communicate to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people their links to these small communities and the land. These complex connections need to be examined further in order to understand the women's lives, and how they situate themselves in both urban and reserve or community politics.

The women in this study share some concerns and goals, but there are also differences. All of them are making an effort to bring about changes to the predominantly male-dominated Aboriginal political institutions and structures. However, none of them is concerned solely with women's issues of gender equality, discrimination or subordination; rather, they are working to end the oppression of Aboriginal peoples, both men and women. These women's narratives indicate that they have differing views on the efficacy of some of the Aboriginal political organizations on the local, provincial, and national levels. Some of them are actively involved as directors or Board members of First Nations organizations, while others are participating in various community programs that are not affiliated with one particular association, or they are withdrawing from the organizational structure to achieve their goals. Karen Hansen's findings (1979) that Aboriginal organizations provide the setting for
Native American women to pursue their interests in Seattle, Washington does not hold true for all of the these First Nations women in Vancouver, B.C.

The feminist redefinition of politics is relevant to this study. For example, anthropologists Sandra Morgen and Ann Bookman, who examined working class women's grassroots political activism in the U.S., refer to politics as "an attempt to change the social and economic institutions that embody the basic power relations in our society" (1988:4). In this instance, the power relations are between the non-Aboriginal society and First Nations communities in Canada. This paper addresses how these female community leaders are effecting change in this power struggle.

There are three primary purposes of this research: 1) to fill the gap in the literature and show the experiences of First Nations women and political organizing in B.C. in the 1990s; 2) to bridge two units of analysis within anthropology: community studies that focus on Aboriginal women and politics on reserves, and urban studies that include the experiences of Aboriginal women in the urban environment, because the two domains are linked in these women's own expressions of their political work; and 3) to include the individual voices of the women who have participated in this research project, because they are important spokespersons for First Nations communities on the Northwest Coast.

METHOD

I began this research project with the intention of interviewing a number of First Nations women who currently live and work in Vancouver, B.C. to gain a better understanding of their participation in Aboriginal politics. The criteria for selection was that the participants are, or have been, in a leadership position in political organizing, that they are from communities within the province of
B.C., and that they have moved to Vancouver. These women are all from small communities or reserves, and they have been involved in the political struggle for self-determination of Aboriginal peoples for many years.

I am primarily interested in their relationship to their home communities, and how they became involved in politics. I asked which councils, organizations and programs they have been active with in Vancouver, in their own or other small communities, and on the provincial, national and international levels; and what their views are on these institutions. Do they manage to work in both the urban and reserve settings? What are their personal and collective goals and concerns?  

Rather than contacting the First Nations political organizations or community programs at the outset, I located two of the women through referrals from people outside of the First Nations community, and these women, in turn, referred me to others (i.e., the "snowball" sample). I also contacted women who are not well-known leaders within the community. Some women I initially contacted were reluctant to participate: they either did not wish to tell their own story, to be a part of an academic research project, or they did not have any free time. The First Nations women who participated in this study were eager to inform non-Aboriginal people about their concerns and goals, and they took time out of their busy schedules to meet with me.

I conducted informal, open-ended interviews with one woman in the Spring and Fall of 1992, and with eight women from February to June, 1993. All of the interviews took place in the greater Vancouver area; I did not travel outside of the city to their reserve or home communities. I met two of the women in their homes, one in her daughter's home, four in their work-places, and in two instances, in cafes. The discussions lasted from one hour to five hours each, and I met with three of the women for a second interview. Half of
the conversations were interactive exchanges rather than a standard question and answer format. Seven of the interviews were tape-recorded with permission of the participant, and field notes were taken for the remainder. Although I observed four of the women at work, the research was not based on participant observation. I also consulted with other First Nations women and men, and these discussions sharpened my thinking about First Nations women and politics in the reserve and off-reserve settings.

Most of the nine women who participated in this study know each other, either through their social networks or community projects. This relationship varies from friends or colleagues to merely knowing of the other person. However, at the time of their interviews they were not aware of who the other participants were. The actual names of the individuals have been included when the participant elected to include her own name, and pseudonyms have been used in two instances. For purposes of anonymity, the names of organizations and tribal affiliations have been altered, or left out completely.

Other research methods I have used are the collection of life histories and collaboration, with a feminist and reflexive approach. I am concerned about ethical issues of representation, authorship, authority, voice, and the power relations that exist between the researcher and the participants, and I have discussed these issues with some of the women. Brief life histories are presented in the thesis to contextualize their individual experiences. I have included some of their comments verbatim to give these women a voice. The women I interviewed have had the opportunity to make editorial changes to this document, and I have incorporated some of their suggestions into the questions and analysis.

It is difficult to produce a truly collaborative -- i.e., multi-authored -- report in the context of an academic thesis initiated by the researcher within an
anthropological analytical framework. It is also problematic writing up research
of this nature because there are two diverse audiences: the academic
community, and the participants in the study. My intention is not to be critical
of these women's experiences, but to present an analysis of complex issues.6

Initially, I briefly discuss the historical background of the economic and
political roles of Native American and First Nations women. As this research is
concerned with First Nations women involved in both urban and community
politics, I review the existing relevant community studies of contemporary
Aboriginal women and politics, and some of the urban studies that have been
conducted in Canada and the U.S. regarding First Nations peoples and Native
Americans.

THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ROLES OF ABORIGINAL WOMEN

Since the mid-1970s, with the growing interest in women's studies and
gender relations, there have been a number of contemporary and ethnohistorical
studies, life histories and autobiographies, that focus on the economic and
political roles of Aboriginal women in Canada and the United States.7 As
mentioned earlier, there has been a recent interest in Aboriginal women from
the Northwest Coast of B.C. and Washington.8

Historical Background

According to the ethnohistorical literature, European colonization in the
United States and Canada has had an impact on Aboriginal women's base of
power in different ways -- in some groups women's status rose during and after
contact, and in others it declined.9
The data indicate that where local populations evolved specialized economies dependent on European markets, and where female work was subsumed under a labor process dominated by men, the status of women declined. In situations where a dependency on these markets was secondary, or where it did not alter existing social formations, the status of women remained stable and in a few situations may have been enhanced (Albers 1989:140).

Many of the case studies in Etienne and Leacock's landmark volume (1980) emphasize the displacement of Native women from social production and their subsequent subordination to men under colonization in Canada and the United States. Norton (1985) examines the significant economic activities of Aboriginal women of the Northwest Coast in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Van Kirk (1980) and Littlefield (1991) emphasize the important role of First Nations women in the maritime fur trade.

Native American researchers M. Annette Jaimes and Theresa Halsey claim that "it is women who have formed the very core of indigenous resistance to genocide and colonization since the first moment of conflict between Indians and invaders" (1992:311). In an essay on the traditional roles of First Nations women in Canada and the impact of colonization, Somer Brodribb maintains that researchers must "take as a starting point the experience of Indian women within their cultures", and that "it is important to remain aware of the full range of economic and ideological forces which limit and constrain women's lives, for female power and reality cannot be separated from the broader social context" (1984:98). For example, in matrilineal societies that valued female autonomy the economic and political roles of Aboriginal women may have differed from other societies during and after the contact period.

Research also indicates that Aboriginal women's status declined with the formation of reservations or reserves in some regions of Canada and the United States in the 19th century, while it did not change substantially in others.10
Among Native American tribal groups in central U.S. there was a decline in women's status because:

...the combined impact of church and state policies transformed communal property relations into private ones, and in so-doing, transferred the means of production in farming (e.g., tools, land, knowledge) from women to men. This, in turn, brought about changes in family structure, and in the role of women in their households and communities (Albers 1989:145-6).

In Canada in 1869, the Indian Act enabled the colonial government to determine the status of "Indian" men and women. It was stipulated that only Indian men had voting rights in band politics, and that Indian women who either married non-Aboriginal men, Indian males who were not legally recognized, or married out to Indian men from the U.S., lost their legal status (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 1991).11

Since the 1970s, numerous studies, reports, and autobiographies have been published in Canada by anthropologists, sociologists, researchers from other fields, and political activists -- both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal -- that either focus specifically on, or include, a discussion of the status of First Nations women as spelled out by the Indian Act.12 Kathleen Jamieson maintains that the Indian Act did not allow women to be politically active until after 1960:

[T]he perpetuation of a system excluding Indian women from access to political power was probably the major impetus for the emergence in the seventies of a dynamic social movement among Native women -- status, non-status and Métis -- aimed at improving their social and legal position and at obtaining immediate improvements in living conditions at the community level. The emergence of this force among Native women which appears to transcend the political, geographical and cultural schisms in the male-oriented organizations has been largely invisible to non-Natives and most Native men (1979:160).

In some Aboriginal communities on reserves and in urban centers in Canada and the U.S., Aboriginal women "have expanded their political and
economic influence since the 1960s,...although in others it appears to remain quite limited" (Albers 1989:139). For example, Bruce Miller discusses the reasons for the "variability between culturally related tribes and bands in [Coast Salish] women's access to public authority" in Washington and B.C. The variables are: "local historical differences in the relationship of Indian groups to white governments", the size of the tribe, median household income and the size of the fishing income (1992:367).

In ethnographic research among the Tlingit in southeastern Alaska, Laura Klein (1976) found that principles of public participation in the economic and political life of the town apply to both women and men throughout the society. Contrary to many studies that view colonization as an impediment to the status of women (Etienne and Leacock 1980), Klein maintains that the range of activities open to women has been broadened by modernization. Klein's claim may be open to dispute because "the sexual division of labor is less rigid" among the Tlingit than among "Euro-Americans", in that "roles are structured more on the basis of ability, training, and personality" than on gender (Klein 1976:179).

Community Studies of Aboriginal Women and Politics

In his ethnographic study of politically active Northern Paiute women in the Great Basin area of Nevada, Robert Lynch maintains that "[a]nthropological studies have not given adequate attention to contemporary Native American women's participation in political life" (1986:352). He describes the specific dynamics of power relations that occurred when a group of related Northern Paiute women successfully managed a small tribal council for over a year during the late 1960s.
Two significant community studies that focus specifically on the participation of contemporary Aboriginal women in the political process in the Northwest are Miller's research on the formal political role of women from Coast Salish communities in western Washington state and B.C. (1989, 1990, 1992), and Jo-Anne Fiske's research on the central role of women in public decision making in a Carrier community in central B.C. (1989, 1990, 1991, 1992). Miller argues that since the 1960s there has been an "opportunity structure" whereby some Coast Salish women in western Washington have become heads of family networks and thereby obtained political support -- he refers to this group as "traditional" -- while others have emerged as "technocrats" who receive community-wide political support. The women from the latter group have technical training and some college education and most of them had no expectation of playing a leadership role in tribal affairs.

Fiske's research in a Carrier community in B.C. (1989, 1990, 1991) also focuses on First Nations women's influence in kinship groups, their social rank and their roles in the elected council and administrative structure. According to her findings, there are three factors that contribute to women's public presence: "women's economic autonomy (which includes control over critical domestic resources), the prevailing ideology of respect for older women's knowledge and wisdom and the socio-economic structure, in which public and private interests are essentially undifferentiated" (1989:ii). In a more recent paper, she claims that Aboriginal women have "developed a political culture in which metaphors of motherhood are central to claims for political equity" (1993:4).

Both Miller and Fiske center their work on Aboriginal women who are in elected positions on tribal councils on reserves or reservations, or who are community leaders of local level voluntary associations. Little attention has been given to women who are politically active in voluntary associations or
other non-elected (or elected) positions in a multi-cultural urban center on the Northwest Coast.

Urban Studies

In the 1960s and 1970s a substantial number of studies on First Nations people and Native Americans in the urban setting emerged in Canada and the United States. Sociological in nature, they focus on the assimilation and acculturation of Aboriginal people relocating to urban centers from reserves, and on the whole they are not particularly relevant to their experiences in the 1990s. Generally, this research does not consider the individual experiences of men and women who are migrating between these two environments, their ties to their homelands following relocation to the urban center, gender differences in the migration process, and the nature of Aboriginal women's political and economic roles on the reserve and in the city.

Despite some continuing interest, the number of published articles or volumes is still relatively small. Two studies that point to the problems of an acculturation model were conducted among Navajo women in urban settings. The researchers emphasize how these women's ties to their Navajo communities continued to be strong despite their movement to cities (Metcalf 1982; Griffen 1982). Wynne Hanson, a Rosebud Sioux, discusses the contemporary Native American urban woman and includes five case studies of women (Lakota, Chippewa, Blackfeet, Creek) who have migrated to various cities, and moved into leadership positions. She claims:

The lack of literature on Indian women leaves many unanswered questions. What are her aspirations, her goals, her conflicts, and her successes? It is important to the Indian community to be aware of where women are going and what impact they have in the areas of education, law, health, politics, employment, and family life, and this information is not readily available (1980:478).
Diana Bahr (1993) responds to Hanson's plea for more literature about urban Aboriginal women in her significant life history research with three generations of contemporary Cupeño women who were born, raised and currently live in Los Angeles, California. Through these women's narratives, she concludes that urban Native Americans redefine themselves, and an ethnic identity emerges in a new form (1993:142-43). 17

The only urban study that is relevant to the experiences of contemporary Aboriginal women on the Northwest Coast is Karen Tranberg Hansen's dissertation on how the setting of urban occupations, associations, and politics affects the ethnicity of Native Americans in Seattle (1979). She profiled women who have been upwardly mobile in the Native American urban opportunity structure and are in positions of leadership. But, her analysis of ethnicity is now outdated; the study is focused on an American urban center, and because her argument is centered on the role of the associations, the Native American women's experiences are merely supporting data.

The present study focuses directly on the experiences of First Nations women who are community leaders in a Canadian city on the Northwest Coast, and whose political work spans from the urban environment to the reserve community. Faith et al. (1991:182) notes:

As we near the end of the 20th century, Native women are becoming increasingly visible as acknowledged leaders within their bands, through national associations, and within community service professions. Such women are at the front lines of resistance against assimilationist policies that have had devastating effects on their people, and they are central to the healing from routine tragedies that beset Native communities across Canada.
Introduction

Vancouver, B.C. has an extensive network of community leaders among the more than 5,000 First Nations women who reside in the city. They are volunteers, Board members, directors, or consultants for one or more of the many First Nations organizations, non-governmental agencies or government offices in Vancouver. There are also First Nations women in positions of leadership in education, health care, media, business, and law and those who are writers and artists. Many First Nations people do not view the arts or education as separate spheres from politics, but rather that Aboriginal politics encompasses all of the other arenas.

Fiske's research on voluntary associations among the Carrier in central B.C. was focused on the reserve setting, nevertheless her summary of the organizations' mandates is useful:

...voluntary associations enter into political dialogue with the state. In conjunction with provincial and/or national umbrella organizations, the associations lobby for better community conditions, for legislative changes which could improve women's status, and most significantly, for protection and/or extension of aboriginal rights and resource territories. The latter struggle is inherently tied to the broader struggle to retain cultural identity and to re-establish economic autonomy (1992:209).

Other issues of concern to the leadership of urban associations are: education, employment training, child welfare, service delivery (i.e., health care) and spiritual healing (e.g., healing the wounds experienced in residential -- or boarding -- schools and/or from domestic violence).

The women who participated in this study in Vancouver have been politically active in urban organizations, education, the government, business and the arts in the city. They have also been involved with tribal councils,
provincial and national First Nations organizations, environmental groups, multi-cultural and non-Aboriginal associations, the United Nations, international indigenous peoples' organizations, and in one instance, the Native American grassroots movement in the United States. They are from various nations and bands from the coast, the north and the interior of B.C. They range in age from 35 to 70, with the average age in the late 40s. One of the women who is in her 40s maintains that many of the political organizers are from her generation.

All of these particular women grew up on reserves or in small communities, and one is from a small city in B.C. Most of the women attended residential schools or religious boarding schools, and one lived in foster homes. They all have stories of the oppression and atrocities that they -- or others close to them -- endured. They initially moved to Vancouver for education or employment purposes. All but one of the women have completed high school, four have attended university, and three have completed their Bachelor's degrees. One woman has attended graduate school, and another was to commence her graduate education in a few months.

Five of these women are single parents, and one woman was married to a non-Aboriginal man for a period of time. Although three of the women in the study are, or were, considered non-status or non-registered First Nations people, they were not affected personally by Bill C-31 -- the 1985 amendment to the Indian Act that reinstated legal status to First Nations women who had married non-Aboriginal or non-status Aboriginal men. All of the women have children, and they have become politically active either prior to becoming mothers, or during the raising of their children.
Life Histories

There is not a single, "correct" Native voice but a diversity of perspectives on a wide range of issues. If anthropology purports to interpret the lives and aspirations of Native peoples, then it must endeavour to discover ways in which these diverging and sometimes contradictory viewpoints can be given voice in our accounts (Dyck 1993:201).

Four of the women will be introduced through brief life histories and the remaining five women's experiences and concerns will be highlighted.

Lillian Howard is a young grandmother at 42 years old; she has two daughters, nineteen and two years old. She is from the west coast of Vancouver Island, and is a member of the Mowachaht band from the Nootka Sound in Nuuchahnulth territory. She attended residential schools in Tofino and Mission, B.C., and high school in Port Alberni, a town on Vancouver Island her parents moved to in order that their family obtain an education. Lillian claims that at that time racism drove most First Nations people from academic courses in public high school; she left school in Grade 11.

When Lillian was 18 years old she was involved with the Port Alberni Friendship Center's teenage club that held dances and other activities. She maintains that as First Nations people they had no place to go in the town, so they had to establish one themselves. When she was 19 years old, the Friendship Center sent her to a conference in Ottawa. This was the beginning of her political involvement and it coincided with the large-scale movement of First Nations people to cities and towns. She upgraded her high school education at a community college, and at 20 years old she became the band manager in her nation for one year. Lillian found it to be an extremely difficult job because of
overcrowding and the social chaos resulting from drugs, alcohol and domestic violence.

After she left this position she moved back and forth between Vancouver and Port Alberni on Vancouver Island. Meanwhile, she became interested in organizations such as the Union of B.C. Chiefs in Vancouver, and on the west coast, the B.C. Association of Non-Status Indians. In the mid-1970s Lillian worked with the West Coast District Council -- now called the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council -- as a land claims worker and community worker, and she travelled to most of the communities in B.C. She was listening to people talk about their territories, what the land and the ocean meant to them, what happened to their resources, and about communities in transition politically, socially, and economically. She comments: "I was pulled into the wave of working with my people...When I was 24 years old I told myself that for the rest of my life I would work with Indian people on Indian issues." Lillian claims that it was one of the best experiences in her life because she was able to meet many elders, community workers and young people.

Lillian got married and settled in Vancouver working with the Union of B.C. Chiefs until 1981 as a fieldworker, coordinator and researcher. According to Lillian, this experience was extremely educational because of what she learned about First Nations people and non-Aboriginals and the political infrastructure of B.C. and Canada. The issues she and her co-workers at the Union of B.C. Chiefs were focusing on were education, social conditions, self-government, self-determination, and Aboriginal rights. Additionally, they worked on fishing rights, environmental concerns, and resource development and how it effects First Nations peoples. They were attempting to be an information service and this is when she learned that "information is power; it can be abused or a benefit." She travelled to many of the communities in the province of B.C and
realized that they were all being badly treated by the federal and provincial governments.

Lillian divorced her husband and decided to leave the Union in 1981. From 1982 to 1986 she attended university and majored in Canadian history. Lillian also took many political science courses and focused on Aboriginal issues. For three and a half years she worked with the School Board as a Native Support Worker. At this time she was more determined than ever to continue to work for her people.

In 1990 Lillian became involved at the "continental" level and she attended a conference in Mexico with the Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance Campaign -- a major turning point in her life. She claims that she serves as a representative of an international indigenous organization because the people who have Aboriginal rights, land claims settlements, or non-treaty areas were not being represented. According to Lillian, indigenous peoples are:
"looking at the environment, land, colonization, youth, women, education...issues. It's just so broad...relations with the state."

After attending an international conference in Guatemala where she found the indigenous peoples' situation to be "horrendous", Lillian's anger and concerns prompted her to begin speaking publicly. Many of the groups she speaks to today are non-Aboriginal, e.g., church groups, students, women's groups, environmental groups, labor people, or International Women's Day committees.

Lillian describes her role in political work variously, depending on her activity: "When I have to do a bit of a profile for myself, I'm a research consultant, or a public educator or if it's related to Aboriginal issues then I'm an activist. I guess I'm more of an activist." Although she is primarily involved with the international organization, she also is active locally in land and
environmental issues, and as a "defender of Aboriginal rights issues." She intends to return to her home community next year to concentrate on local level politics because the elders have asked her to return, but she will still continue to work for the indigenous peoples' organization.  

Lillian discusses some of her goals and concerns:

That's really what we want is a healthy people living in their homelands without having to live in fear or having to live like we're living in a stranger's land. We've become strangers on our own land, in a sense, because we've been relocated or pulled away from our land. But, I really feel that it's important for Native and non-Native people to come to understand, to work together, to bridge build, just so that we can protect what we have left -- our lands.

As women we have responsibility to bring up our children. Why should we let it continue, why can't we break that cycle? It is something that as indigenous women we have to talk about. And I do a lot of communication with women in the First Nations community and most of the women leaders, organizers, artists in B.C. I've been involved for over 25 years. We find that in order to break that cycle we have to look at ourselves personally. That whole healing process right now is so much a part of the survival of who we are as First Nations peoples, who we are as women, who we are as mothers of our children, who we are in terms of family, with the men, the relationship with men and women. We have to question why is there so much domestic violence, why is there so much sexual abuse? Why is there so much turmoil? And we have to go to the root cause...way back, which is colonization. We have to do a lot of evaluating and analyzing, personally, and the community, and as a whole group of First Nations people. So, that's really helped empower our people.

Susan Tatoosh is a 54 year old Shuswap woman from Kamloops, a small city in the interior of British Columbia. Her mother lived on a reserve until she married Susan's father, then they lived off-reserve because they were non-status Indians, as defined by the Indian Act. Susan was the first First Nations person to graduate from a public high school in Kamloops. She began nurse's training and
she then went in to the Air Force for five years as a radar control operator and she met her husband, a non-Aboriginal man. They had three children and travelled across Canada and overseas, and returned to settle in Kamloops. She worked for the B.C. Telephone Company and became an active member of the telecommunications union.

In 1972, her "uncle" informed her that it was time to bring her strengths back to her First Nations community. She became involved with the Friendship Center movement and was elected as a leader at the local and provincial level. At the age of 35, after the death of her husband, Susan enrolled in a Business Administration program. At this time, she and three First Nations men formed a "Native owned and operated" construction company that was in operation for five years. The manager at the Canada Employment office in Kamloops asked Susan to run a Native Outreach Program for Native Women, the first of its kind across Canada. She stayed in that administrative position for three years and then became involved in the "Native women's movement" with the B.C. Native Women's Society. For eighteen months she filled the position as the first Native Women's Employment Coordinator for B.C. and the Yukon.

According to Susan, in the 1970s First Nations women lacked access to information about Aboriginal peoples' employment, training and educational opportunities. Instead, information was disseminated to the primarily male-dominated band councils by the local, provincial and federal non-Aboriginal institutions, and Aboriginal political organizations. She travelled throughout the province providing information to First Nations women on employment and training. She led personal development workshops to benefit not only the individual, but also the family, the community, and their nations. Susan claims that she was met with some opposition by First Nations men, especially in the north.
In 1981 Susan re-married a First Nations man; the marriage did not last. She originally moved to Vancouver for reconciliation purposes, and remained in the city after her marriage broke up. She became the Coordinator for Urban Images for Native Women, an employment training organization, for about eight months. Her peers asked her to apply for a position with the employment division of the federal government's Public Service Commission. Susan has been working at the Commission for six years, specifically with First Nations peoples.

Susan calls herself an advocate. She has been in political roles in First Nations and non-Aboriginal organizations at the municipal, provincial and federal levels, although she emphasizes that she has not been a provincial or national leader. In both Kamloops and Vancouver she has served on the Board of Directors and on the executive staff of various First Nations organizations working on issues such as education, employment, training, economic development and social justice. Susan indicates some of the concerns of First Nations peoples throughout the province of B.C. and in Canada:

The overall development throughout the years has been personal development -- needs and growth -- community, social and economic development (and input into the community)...The social issues are housing, education, and health. Economic issues are employment -- meaning contribution to the community, money into the community rather than outside. Grassroots level of community development as opposed to government; not the experts' point of view.

In the last four years Susan has reduced her political activities and she is stepping back to allow younger knowledgeable and experienced people to take over. She maintains that in the past there was a "strong sisterhood, a real trust that is missing now [in the First Nations Women's organizations]. It is more competitive rather than cooperative, more power of information as opposed to
sharing." She states that "some of the women's associations are taking strong stances that don't represent the collective.", but emphasizes that this is not occurring at the grassroots level but on the provincial and national levels.

Susan claims that she is withdrawing from organizational work and that she has been drawn to the spiritual teachings of her elders. She has been adopted by an elder into a reserve that is closer to Vancouver than her homeland. She views it as her second home and travels there every weekend "to get grounded" and "to reconnect with the issues and concerns of a small band." She needs this "for balance -- spiritually, emotionally, physically and mentally."

Fay Blaney, a 36 year old married woman with two children, three and eight years old, is from the Homalco Band, a northern Coast Salish group. She grew up in an isolated area with no running water or electricity, and learned to speak English when she started school at the age of 6. Fay attended residential schools intermittently throughout her teens. She first came to Vancouver when she was 15 years old to escape from her "violent and abusive" home community. She finished her high school education and attended community college for two years in the city. Fay first got involved with political organizing when she took a summer job carrying out historical research for the United Native Nations. She went to an annual assembly attended by First Nations people from all over the province. "That was really inspiring. The lights went on all over the place for me." Fay then took on contract work and became aware of "the real glaring injustices, the things that had been done to [her] people." She has continued to work with various organizations and programs since that time.

Fay was involved with the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs on a child welfare study; she performed health consultations, and carried out land claims research. She helped to organize the Indian Child Caravan and the Constitution Express.
Travelling to various communities, she conducted workshops to educate First Nations people. It was at this time that she became concerned about issues surrounding Aboriginal women and she focused on indigenous and women's organizations. For three years, she worked with the Native Education Center as an instructional assistant and tutor, and for shorter periods with other Native organizations that are concerned with issues such as employment training and counselling.

On more than one occasion Fay has left her job due to internal organizational problems. She maintains that she has had a career of confrontation because she challenges the injustices taking place, both within and outside the organizations. "Now it's really clear to me, I see this going on time and time again. In different organizations, it becomes a statist[istic]s game rather than a concern for the people that we're serving."

Her discouragement with some of the First Nations organizations prompted her decision to return to school. She took History and Women's Studies courses and became involved with a First Nations Student Association at university. Fay comments: "the only way that I am going to be able to be effective in the First Nations community is to take a position of leadership in something, and the only way I will do it is if I have a piece of paper in my hand, my degree." On the other hand, with some First Nations people she "gets shunned for being in university and for speaking different." Fay's experience at university has been beneficial: "it's really opened my eyes to a much larger world than I would have been exposed to just consigning myself to Native groups." She is planning to pursue a graduate degree in Education.

At the time of our discussion, Fay was working on a research project with the Indian Homemakers Association, one of the First Nations women's organizations in Vancouver.
Fay left her home community years ago because of the destructive activities she was witnessing. Today she feels the need to return:

I would like to go home, I wouldn't want to stay there, but I'd like to go there and work for maybe five or ten years, and work with the development of the new community. But there's just a crisis and chaos constantly with the people from the community...So, it's really divided right now...I'd like to get some cultural programs happening while there's people around to teach the language, skills, crafts, values and stories...I really have a belief in upgrading because I've seen what can happen to people and how their attitudes can change.

Fay discusses some of her concerns:

I find self-government really scary. I don't particularly support the way it is unfolding. I don't like the way that these prominent Native men leaders are negotiating these agreements and they aren't seeking the input of the community. They are developing these little dictatorships within the community, and ours is a prime example of it...The corruption is incredible that is going on in our community.

I really believed in what the national Native Association of Women were advocating in the Charlottetown Accord. When they were advocating the 'No' position [on the Referendum] and they were saying that if self-government is going to become a reality then they better consult with the women. We're quoting these stats right now that nine out of ten Aboriginal women are victims of wife battering and yet we're excluded from the process. And I've seen it for myself in the work that I've been doing all these years. I find that our politicians, they exempt themselves from the healing process and they're the ones that still carry on abusing women.

Terri Netsena is a 39 year old mother of three, from the Tahltan nation in northern B.C. She did not actually grow up on her reserve because her parents moved away due to the community's isolation and lack of opportunities for employment. She attended a residential school in the Yukon and began waitressing at the age of fourteen. Terri got her first job with a band office in
southern Yukon when she was seventeen years old. She describes how she felt after she landed this job, in which she was initially filling in for her friend:

I was given a break and I think it really was a God-send...I really liked the idea of improving the situation because up to that point I didn't know of any Indian women who worked in offices; it was just beginning. We were chamber maids and waitresses, and anything else...So, it was really like a wonderful thing for me to be doing something other than waitressing.

For a brief period of time Terri moved to Vancouver to go to college, and then she returned to the north. She became involved in First Nations politics in communities in northern B.C. and the Yukon, including a short period when she served on her own tribal council. Terri moved back to Vancouver for educational reasons because she "decided that in the political arena there wasn't much room for advancement for me as a woman, and I would probably be a secretary forever, and I wasn't being treated fairly or recognized... So I went to university...and I graduated four years ago in economics and a minor in linguistics."

Some of her family had moved back to her reserve community so after graduation she decided to return home, but she soon realized that it is not "such a wonderful place."

...It's just like living in the dark ages. It's extremely oppressive, the politics are as oppressive as you can get. And I went in there with all these wonderful ideas of stuff I learned in the south, and they were not acceptable. Sexual abuse was not talked about. Advancing people was never considered. You get in there and you do something for yourself, and your family, and your immediate family, but it was not a big concern about advancing the group as a whole, I didn't see.

I had a very, very heart-breaking experience going through all of that...I really came up against a code of silence and that was really tough. It took me quite a while to come out of it, but it was a really important learning thing for me and I don't think I'll ever have to learn that again.
You know that women there in my home [community], they've got a very distinctive role...It's changing. There are women now in leadership roles, but they're viewed as...they're just mouthy, they're always gossiping, or starting trouble, they're not viewed as highly regarded...They're not used to women speaking out.

Terri is certain that she does not want to return for some time, after a period of living in both the city and her community: "Whereas before I lived back there and I lived here, and it was like I had my foot in two worlds; and it's a tough situation to be in." Her university education has not been readily accepted in her home community, especially by the male leaders: "Once you get an education, it's almost as if they view you as you've learned these white ways...It's a big threat to the men's positions because they had a very secure position, I think, up to that point."

Terri moved out of her community and she got a position with a tribal council in central B.C. working on economic development. She returned to Vancouver a couple of years ago and six months prior to our meeting, she became the Coordinator of the Aboriginal Women's Council -- the first time she has worked in a women's organization. The Council serves as an umbrella group for other First Nations women's associations in B.C. Their mandate is centered around family violence, sexual abuse and healing, and justice projects. They network with many different kinds of organizations, First Nations and non-Aboriginal, and the government.

Terri discusses some of her personal goals and concerns:

What's important to me is that women have the opportunity to develop their potential, to become what it is they want. To decrease the barriers from keeping women oppressed, keeping them uneducated, keeping them in a victim role. For my daughter...I see the difference with some of the young girls of her age in the community...I guess what we need are the role models. We need to give some women opportunity to become whatever they want to be
and do the jobs they want to do, without having to think, 'Am I smart enough?' What about, 'Can I move out of this community?' To give them the freedom to do that; [to] give them the choices and opportunity is my personal objective.

We lived under oppression since we were put in residential schools -- since the Europeans came here -- and it's tough to get out of, because we've become oppressive people as well. Our systems are not totally free of oppression. People still are in there for their own interest; people are still in there to control and damage and hurt other people, because that's the way we've been treated. But I don't think that's an excuse any more. We need to analyze our systems and our governments and look at the fairest way possible because other than that, if we don't, then we're just really duplicating what is out in the broader society.

I couldn't vote 'Yes' [on the Referendum], because the problem is there's too much oppression in our government, the band governments, there's a lot of nepotism. And with self-government, I think we would be putting ourselves at the mercy of the male leaders. I can't say that I could put my life in their hands, or my kids, or what's going to come of it. There's got to be a lot of changes. The system's got to be thought through before we can go to self-government. Otherwise, we'd just be foolish. It would be nice if we could say 'Yeah, we have something there that is traditional'...But what our traditional governments were is not what they're going to go back to today.

Lorna Williams is from the St'at'umc Nation in Mount Currie, B.C., a small community a few hours north of Vancouver. She is 45 years old and has one child. She first became politically active when she organized a youth group at the age of sixteen. A few years later she counselled First Nations students from boarding homes. Lorna then focused primarily on education and curriculum development and training. She has been on the Board of Directors of numerous First Nations and non-Aboriginal organizations for many years. She moved to Vancouver initially for educational purposes; she took a course toward a nurse's degree and has completed the coursework for a Master's in Education.
Currently Lorna holds an important position with an educational institution in Vancouver. She maintains that her First Nations' program work is not only focused on the urban environment, but that it also encompasses the reserve communities.

I don't think that you can really divide...there's no boundary. I'm located here, I do a lot of my work here, I do a lot of work outside of Vancouver...I do some training in [her home community] but that's where my family is, that's my homeland.

Her main concern is to be:

Committed to children...that our children's children will be able to live in a world where they don't need to fear poverty and violence, where they can continue to be creative, to be full participants in any society they choose.

Lorna's views on self-government:

The way that people perceive self-government is a continuation of the paternalistic system of government that was imposed on Aboriginal people. Our way of governing ourselves was very much different and so the only way that it's going to be respectful to all people again is if we can articulate, document, codify those traditional systems and then take a look at how we're living today and how our people have to live in this kind of a system, which is very paternalistic...So, whenever people use tribal councils, band councils, and that form of government it will not be respectful and kind to women and children; just the same as in your system, in your world, in the Euro-Canadian world.

Fran Parker (a pseudonym) is also a young grandmother at the age of 35 years old, with three children aged 16, 12, and three. She is Coast Salish from Vancouver Island. She got her start as a political organizer when she was only 16 years old: she travelled from her reserve with a group of young First Nations men and women to Ottawa, to protest the federal government's control over Aboriginal affairs. She has been extremely active in various capacities -- locally (in her home community and in Vancouver), nationally, in the United States,
and internationally -- since that time. Fran is primarily involved with the environmental movement and human rights issues, and she is concerned about colonization and maintaining peace and freedom for indigenous peoples. She claims that her ability to become an important leader and a delegate for her people all around the world -- even though she does not have Grade 12 -- is determination. As she states it: "It was not the chiefs, not the Indian Affairs, nor the women's groups that got me there, but determination."

Fran maintains that she is carrying out all her work so she can go home [to her reserve community]: "What we're working on in all these venues of political arenas and community arenas, the environmental arena, is the children." She feels that she and others have been "doing the organizational paper work for many years but now we have the spiritual in one hand and the documents in the other. We are trying to find the balance between the heart and the mind."

Gloria Nicolson is 55 years old and is a member of the Tsawataineuk band in the Kwakuitl nation. She grew up in a remote village on the mainland of B.C. adjacent to the northern part of Vancouver Island and attended a residential school. She claims that she became involved in "village politics" when she was "young and idealistic." Her mother's participation on the band council initially sparked her interest in the divided politics that were taking place on her reserve. She became a band council member and worked with her community, and on Vancouver Island for a number of years before moving to Vancouver when she separated from her husband. She has five daughters and two step-children.

Gloria has worked in the field of education, and has been a volunteer and Board member for various First Nations organizations and governmental agencies. Along with her political work as Executive Director of the Professional
Native Women's Association, she has become a facilitator of healing workshops for First Nations peoples:

A priority is healing...we cannot move forward until we've gone through the healing process...Most important is healing, to clear the path for the reclaiming of our heritage that was almost lost. It is happening now.

Sandra Brown (a pseudonym) is 70 years old and has seven children. She has been politically active for a number of years in Vancouver, in her home community, and on the national and global levels. She is from a high-ranking family -- her grandfather was the chief of her nation -- and she has served as the head of her tribal council. She claims that she has responsibilities to her family lineage to be involved in politics, and she moves back and forth between her reserve and the urban center in her leadership roles. Sandra maintains that she always has ties to her reserve even when she lives in Vancouver, and as a result she has been "torn in half" in her political work. She has acted as a representative for her tribal council and was involved in political decision-making during the time she resided in Vancouver. When we had our discussions in late 1992, she was planning to move back to her reserve to assist with community development.

Sandra is concerned about colonization, land rights, sovereignty, women's issues, child welfare and the environment. She believes that "there needs to be a balance with both men and women working in the Native movement. We are not going to get anywhere without that balance."

Marge White is 57 years old and has two daughters and two granddaughters. She is Huu-ay-aht from the Nuuchahnulth tribe, and was born in Port Alberni on Vancouver Island. She began her career working with First
Nations communities years ago in a social service agency that assisted Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people who had moved to the city. She was instrumental in establishing the Friendship Center in Vancouver.

Marge has devoted at least thirty-five years of her life to the social concerns of First Nations people in the city of Vancouver. Since 1957 she has been active on the Board of Directors of various voluntary organizations, and assisted as a founding member either on a local, provincial, or national level. She was appointed by the federal government to the position of Citizenship Court Judge, the first time an appointment was bestowed on a First Nations person. Marge has also worked with the local justice system in Vancouver, and she is currently the director of a First Nations service organization in the city.

Her concerns are centered around the family; her work is not targeted individually to women, men, or children. She describes herself as being in the service field and not a political person, but she admits: "what area do we work in that doesn't at some point become a political issue?"

Marge feels strongly about her identity and connection to her home community:

Although I've lived in this city for so long, I still have a lot of very strong feelings about how we did things a long time ago, and our traditional systems and our customs and our culture. And I think I've become more aware of it over the years... Although I worked with our people in the city for a long time, I was really just helping them get adjusted to this kind of a lifestyle. But, I think now more and more I'm turning to what's happening at home, and really going back to find out a little bit more about what is going on.

She returns regularly to her community for brief visits. Her "dream" is:

To eventually return to my home area because I think that there is a lot of potential for development, but it's really lacked a leadership vision. And the majority of the people that are on our reserve are people who have always lived there and have not experienced life in the outside world, so to speak...I was asked by a couple of people
if I had ever thought about going home, and one of them said I think it's time you came home to work. So, I think there is that need for us to go back and bring home some of the knowledge and experience that we've acquired while we were outside, and some of the resources that we've acquired while we were out here. And I think that each one of us has a dream about returning and certainly about how we would like our reserve to progress.

**DISCUSSION**

**Connections to Home Communities**

It is evident from this research that these particular women who have moved to Vancouver from reserves or small communities are closely tied to their nations or bands, even if they have been residing in Vancouver for many years, or if their home communities are experiencing internal strife. The words they use to describe this relationship suggest how strong their connections are. Although expressed differently, all of them talk about the responsibility they have to their families, communities, bands, or nations. Other First Nations women in the city also emphasize how their identity and world-view are connected to their communities, and one woman describes this relationship as a form of "loyalty." She claims that in her political work she does not look for city women, but instead values those who look to their home or reserve for their identity.

Two of the women in this study claim that they have been requested by their families and other community members to return to their communities to assist with political, economic and social development because of the expertise they have gained in their political work in the city. Two other women have chosen to return to their communities when it is convenient to break away from their activities in Vancouver, and their national and international affiliations. Fran Parker maintains that she is carrying out all of her political work so she can
return to her homeland. As stated above, Marge White feels that all of her peers would like to return to see their reserves become healthy and viable communities.

Three of the participants claim that they are politically active in the urban center and on their reserves concurrently. Susan Tatoosh is involved in band politics in a small community closer to Vancouver than her hometown to balance out her life in the city. Lorna Williams states that there are no boundaries between her work in the city and in her small reserve community, and she does not indicate any problems working in both regions. A discussion with another First Nations woman indicates that she also feels that she is able to be involved with community development and other activities in her home community although she is not residing there. On the other hand, Sandra Brown finds that she has been pulled in two directions because she always has ties to her nation even when she is living and working in Vancouver.

Two of the women explain that they are criticized by other First Nations people because of their formal education and experiences working in Vancouver. They maintain that some of the men on their reserves are threatened by them because they have become leaders in mainstream society. To these women, corruption of band politics makes it difficult for them to return to their home communities at this stage in their lives. Fay Blaney wishes to go back to assist with cultural programs for a period of time in the future. Terri Netsena attempted to live and work on her reserve after she obtained a university education and assisted with economic development in other communities. She describes her "heart-breaking" experience of returning to her reserve and being confronted with community members who do not want to address their own problems. This situation caused her to remain in the city on a full-time basis.
Nevertheless, in her organizational work she is engaged in activities that involve First Nations women from various communities in the province of B.C.

These women state how deeply connected they are to their respective communities, and how their work spans both the city and the reserve, yet it appears that it is often difficult for them to actually return to those communities. The various responses of the women indicate how complex the situation is for politically active First Nations women who live in an urban center. As stated above, some of the women directly discuss the difficulties of moving back and forth between the two regions, while others do not. Will any of the women face similar problems when they return to their communities in the future? Marge White visits her community frequently and dreams of returning with some of the knowledge and experience she has gained in the city. Although unstated, it may be difficult for her to actually live there, even though she has been asked to move back.

These First Nations women have the need to talk about community and land while living and working in Vancouver, B.C. in order to explain to a non-Aboriginal researcher, and others -- both First Nations peoples and non-Aboriginals -- that they are competent to speak about these issues. They began their political organizing in small communities, and for the most part, they are still engaged in community work, although they are now situated in a large city. They want it to be known that their participation in Aboriginal political, economic and social development is not restricted to the off-reserve population.

Concerns and Goals

The words of the individual women presented above indicate that they share some concerns and goals, but there are also evident differences. Each of them is making an effort to bring about changes to the predominantly male-
dominated Aboriginal political institutions and structures in their leadership roles in First Nations political associations, service organizations, women's councils, education centers, the government and non-governmental organizations. It is apparent that some are focusing on the maltreatment of women in both reserve and off-reserve settings more than others. Yet, none of these women is concerned solely with women's issues of gender equality, discrimination or subordination. Rather, they are working to end the oppression of Aboriginal peoples, both men and women, and they share a common goal of resistance to colonization. Many of them express concern about how their own communities are replicating the oppressive values of the broader society. Some women are fearful that acquiring the right to self-government will not free First Nations peoples, because the Aboriginal leaders have created another form of "paternalistic" government without consulting the community at large.

These women do differ in how they choose to effect change. It is apparent that some have been more active in grassroots political organizing than others. A few of them have been involved primarily with First Nations women's associations, others with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social justice organizations or non-governmental agencies -- either locally, nationally or internationally (or all three) -- while others have been elected members of tribal councils before coming to Vancouver. Some are, or have been, in governmental positions at the civic, provincial or federal level and provide services for Aboriginal peoples and/or the multi-cultural population of Vancouver, B.C., or Canada.

As stated above, the findings from this research do not coincide with Hansen's conclusion that for Native American women in Seattle, Washington, organizations provide the setting in which to pursue ethnic interests (1979). Some of the nine women I interviewed and others I consulted are moving away
from First Nations organizations, and are pursuing their interests in their community by other means. They are consultants, political organizers, or activists and are working on various community projects that are not affiliated with one particular association. The women who are critical of some of these organizations are aware that other First Nations women who are committed to the goals of various women's associations or single-issue interest groups do not share their views. Some women express resentment that the power and information are located in the hands of the elites of the political organizations, and that the collective or community are not participants in the decision-making process. This issue appears to have caused a division among the population of First Nations women who are community leaders in Vancouver. Those who are withdrawing from active participation in political organizing state that they are focusing on their own personal development and spiritual growth, while others are seeking the strength to heal themselves and their communities from within the organizational structure.

CONCLUSION

As a contribution to the existing literature on Aboriginal women from the Northwest Coast, this thesis has aimed to demonstrate the contemporary experiences of nine First Nations women involved in Aboriginal politics in Vancouver, B.C. It is essential to hear their individual voices to gain a better understanding of the goals and concerns of some of the influential First Nations female community leaders in B.C. today.

The significance of this research is that it shows how the anthropological and sociological literature cannot be separated into two units of analysis -- community studies and urban studies -- when focusing on First Nations women and Aboriginal politics. This is not the way these women experience their lives
in the 1990s. They are working and living in an urban environment, yet they maintain that their political organizing and leadership roles encompass both the city and the reserve. In some instances they are actively involved on the national level and with the global concerns of indigenous peoples. These women express how they have significant ties to their home communities not only with respect to their families, but also in their concern for the well-being of these communities.

In analyzing the women's narratives, I have concluded that their connections to their own communities are complex, and that moving back and forth between the city and the reserve is not always easily accomplished. They are often viewed by community members and others as educated urban women whose political work is limited to urban issues. These politically active women need to emphasize that they find value in working for First Nations peoples in both the urban center and the reserve or small community, despite residing in a large city.

These women have worked in various leadership roles in their efforts to effect change in the power relations between the non-Aboriginal society and First Nations communities in Vancouver, British Columbia, and Canada. Although there are differences in the focus of their work and in their personal goals, they are all concerned about improving the conditions of reserve and off-reserve communities, and removing the limits that have been imposed on Aboriginal peoples by colonization.
NOTES

1. Bataille and Sands' 1991 annotated bibliography and research guide on Native American women includes only five studies from this region.

2. The terms of reference for First Nations peoples change rapidly in Canada and are regionally based. There has been a shift from the term "Native" to "Aboriginal." In the U.S. "Indians" and "Native Americans" are the terms primarily used. I have chosen the term "First Nations" when referring to people living in Canada, "Aboriginal" for people in Canada and the U.S., and "Native Americans" for people residing in the U.S. only.

3. Other topics including feminism and the women's movement, traditional roles of Aboriginal women, and leadership were also discussed but are not included here.

4. See Anderson and Jack (1991) for a discussion on the interactive process in interviewing. "Realizing the possibilities of the oral history interview demands a shift in methodology from information gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoint" (p. 23).

5. I am constantly aware that I bring my biases to this research project because I am a non-Aboriginal academic. I am also aware that many First Nations and Native American people are discouraged with anthropological studies that appropriate information merely for academic purposes. See Haig-Brown (1992) for an important discussion about a non-Aboriginal researcher conducting research with First Nations communities in B.C., and Weibel-Orlando's (1991) ethical dilemmas working with Native Americans in Los Angeles, California.

6. See the essays in Gluck and Patai (1991) for significant discussions about ethical problems encountered in carrying out feminist oral history research, i.e., dual allegiances, the crisis of interpretation, and the research product (or write-up).

7. Aside from review essays (Albers 1989; Green 1980; Jaimes and Halsey 1992; Kidwell 1975) and volumes (Bataille and Sands 1984, 1991; Green 1983; Medicine 1978; Verble 1981) that cover many regions and tribes, this literature includes research on Navajo women in Arizona (Griffen 1982; Lamphere 1989; Leighton 1982; Shepardson 1982; Stewart 1980); Paiute women in Nevada and Utah (Lynch 1986; Knack 1989); Native American women from the Plains (Albers 1983; Weist 1980); and the Dakota (Albers 1985) and Oglala (or Sioux) (Powers 1986) in South Dakota; Tlingit women in Alaska (Klein 1976, 1980); and life histories of Athabascan and Tlingit female elders in the Yukon (Cruikshank 1990); an
Inupiaq (Eskimo) woman in the Arctic (Blackman 1989) and an autobiography by a Lakota woman in South Dakota (Crow Dog 1990).

8. Ethnohistorical studies include research on the economic roles of Aboriginal women from the 18th to the 20th centuries (Donaldson 1985; Littlefield 1991; Mitchell and Franklin 1984; Norton 1985; and Van Kirk 1980). The contemporary studies include the first life history of a Northwest Coast (Haida) woman (Blackman 1981, 1982, 1992), and research on Coast Salish women and politics (Miller 1989, 1990, 1992). Other studies on Aboriginal women close to the coastal region include the Colville (Plateau) reservation in Washington (Ackerman 1988), the Carrier in central B.C. (Fiske 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993; Moran 1988) and the Kamloops area, also in the interior of the province (Faith et al. 1991).


11. It was not until 1985 when Bill C-31 was enacted, that some First Nations women were able to regain their legal status. This amendment to the Indian Act removed the sexually-discriminatory Section 12(1)(b) described above.


13. Another important essay is Karlene Faith's roundtable interview with four First Nations women from the interior of B.C. "whose lives have been directly linked to the goal of justice for Native people" (Faith et al. 1991:171). Faith adds an introduction and some editorial comments to an otherwise verbatim conversation. Sharon McIvor, a participant in Faith's interview, is currently the Justice Coordinator on the Executive Committee of the Native Women's Association of Canada.

14. Fiske (1993) also analyzes the political strategies of the national organization, the Native Women's Association of Canada, in a discussion on Aboriginal women and the ideology of motherhood.
15. The journal *Aquelarre* published an issue on "First Nations Women of the Americas" (1991/2) which includes interviews with politically active women from Vancouver. See also Secretary of State (1975) for brief biographies of prominent First Nations women in Vancouver and throughout B.C., and Pape for a list of "Vancouver Networkers" -- Aboriginal women who "support justice for First Nations" (1992:8).

16. See, e.g., Chadwick and Stauss 1975; Dosman 1972; Hawthorn et al. 1960; Sorkin 1978; Stanbury 1975; Waddell and Watson 1971; Yerbury 1980. Stanbury (1975) and Yerbury (1980) include significant statistics on First Nations women who have migrated to the urban center -- mainly Vancouver -- from reserves and communities within B.C., and Yerbury is critical of the acculturation models that many social scientists have used in their studies of the First Nations urban population. Yet, because their research is highly quantitative and generalized, it is not especially relevant to this study.

17. For other relevant studies in the U.S., see Weibel-Orlando's (1991) research on how Native Americans maintain an ethnic community in a "complex" society in Los Angeles, California; and Guillemín (1975) for an account of urban Micmac men and women in Boston, Massachusetts. For research carried out in Canada see Meadows (1981) who focuses on the coping strategies, role strain and conflict incurred by First Nations women adapting to urban life in Calgary, Alberta; and Krotz (1980) who includes case studies of First Nations men and women in Edmonton, Alberta; Regina, Saskatchewan; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. The experience of contemporary First Nations peoples is also well documented in an anthropological study by Kerri (1978) that includes life histories of Indian and Métis women and men, also in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

18. According to the 1986 Census there are 5,605 First Nations female inhabitants (Statistics Canada 1990). This does not include residents from the outlying areas of Vancouver. The First Nations population in B.C. is approximately 93,000 persons (Taylor and Paget 1989:300).

19. To name some of the organizations, forums, education or resource centers, there are (the following are in no particular order): the United Native Nations, Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, Urban Representative Body of Aboriginal Nations Society (URBAN), Legal Services Society - Native Program, First Nations Summit Task Group, Aboriginal Council of B.C., the Allied Indian and Métis Society (AIMS), the Native Education Center, and the First Nations House of Learning at the University of British Columbia. Some of the women's groups are: B.C. Native Women's Society, Urban Images for Native Women, Aboriginal Women's Council, Indian Homemakers Association, and the Professional Native Women's Association.
20. Many First Nations men and women informed me on this issue. See Jensen and Brooks' 1991 collection of First Nations contributors that covers a wide range of topics including language, education and political activism.


22. Many First Nations political organizations in Canada came into fruition in the 1960s when significant funding was first made available by the federal government, i.e., the Department of Indian Affairs -- now referred to as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). Currently, the national Aboriginal organizations in Canada are: the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) (formerly the National Indian Brotherhood) (NIB) representing "status Indians", the Métis National Council (MNC) representing the Métis, the Native Council of Canada (NCC) representing "non-status Indians", and the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (ITC) representing the Inuit. The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) represents First Nations women from all parts of Canada and the Inuit Women's Association (IWA) represents Inuit women (Sawchuk 1993). From 1974 to 1981 there were two national Native women's organizations: the NWAC and the National Committee on Indian Rights for Indian Women (IRIW). After IRIW dissolved on the national level, it continued as an Alberta Native women's group (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 1991).

23. There are approximately "30 tribal groups and 200 bands" in British Columbia (Faith et al. 1991:169), and "1,628 reserves located in all parts of the province but [they are] concentrated in the southwest, along the coast and along the major river systems" (Taylor and Paget 1989:300).

24. "Almost one-third of Native families are headed by a single female parent, compared to 10% for Canada as a whole" (Faith et al. 1991:171).

25. The ages indicated for the participants and their children are at the time the interviews took place.

26. Friendship centers were self-help associations set up in the 1960s and 1970s to provide assistance to First Nations people who were migrating from reserves to cities across Canada.

27. Ahenakew (1985:24) provides a useful definition of this term: "The concept of First Nations self-government is usually understood to mean two broad
groups of jurisdictions: each First Nation governing its own people and their affairs, and governing their land and its use. Traditionally among First Nations, these two concepts are combined."

28. Approximately six months after I met Lillian Howard, she was elected as a Co-Chair of the Nuuchahnulth Tribal Council on Vancouver Island. She is one of three political representatives of the Council, and the first woman to have been elected to this position. She is currently residing on Vancouver Island.

29. On August 28, 1992 in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, an agreement was reached by the Canadian government's First Ministers, Territorial and Aboriginal leaders on changes to be made to the Canadian Constitution. This came to be known as the Charlottetown Accord or Constitutional Agreement. One of the components of the Accord was Aboriginal Rights. They proposed that Aboriginal peoples within Canada have the inherent right to self-government. The Native Women's Association of Canada was not given a seat at the constitutional table. (See n. 27 and 30.)

30. The Referendum was held in October, 1992 for the citizens of Canada to vote on the proposed changes to the Canadian Constitution made at the Charlottetown Accord. A single yes/no vote was required on issues that included Aboriginal rights, parliamentary reform, and federal and provincial government jurisdiction. (See n. 27 and 29.) The Native Women's Association of Canada, in opposition to the male-dominated Aboriginal leaders, voted 'No' on the Referendum. They believed that First Nations women's individual rights would not be protected under the proposed Constitutional Agreement and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. The 1992 Referendum did not pass.

31. These findings concur with Griffen's research (1982) on Navajo women in Flagstaff, Arizona. On the other hand, Meadows (1981) maintains that the women in her study lacked strong reserve bonds after living in Calgary, Alberta for a number of years.

32. As stated above in n. 27, Lillian Howard has moved back to work in her tribal territory.

33. Anthropologist Julie Cruikshank has observed that Aboriginal women from the Yukon experience the same dilemmas when they return to their communities after living and working in the city (personal communication, November 1993).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


